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62 September 2012

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The Amazing Spider-Man
LEGO Batman 2
Quantum

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ASSASSIN'S CREED III
The revolution continues on PS3 and Vita

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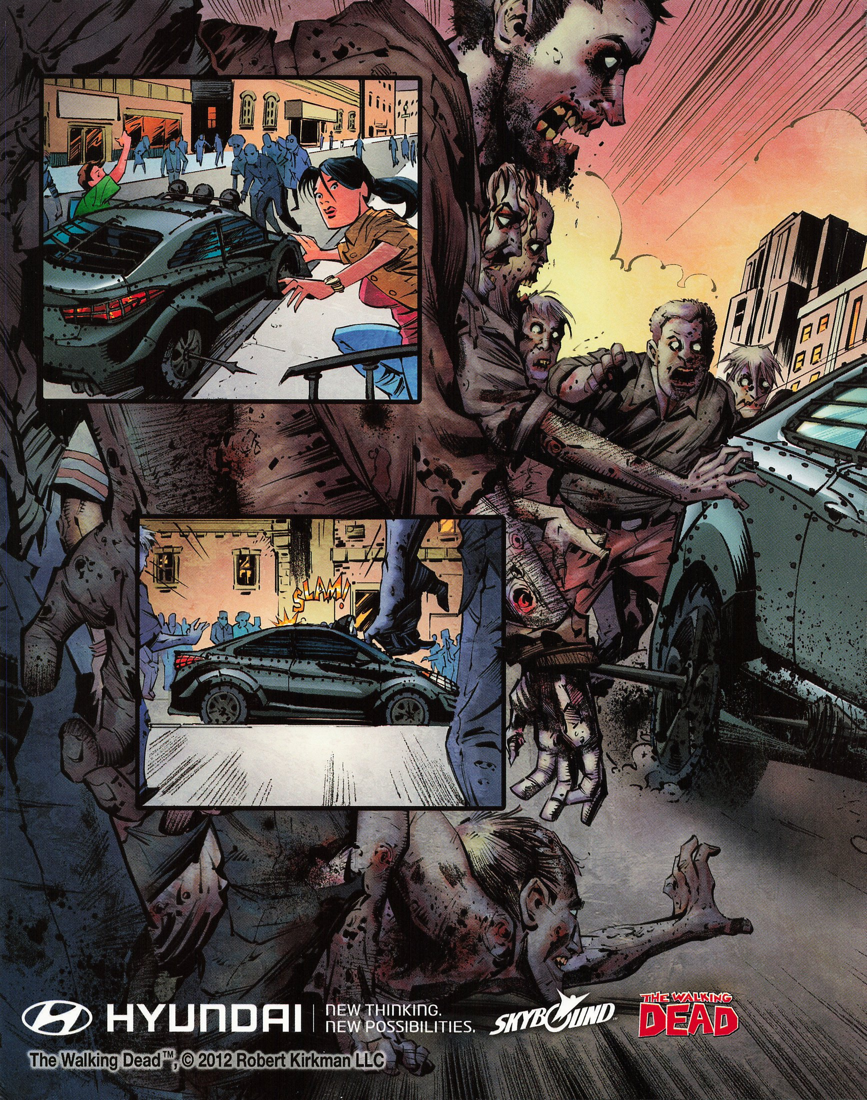
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NEW POSSIBILITIES.
SKYBOUND
THE WALKING DEAD

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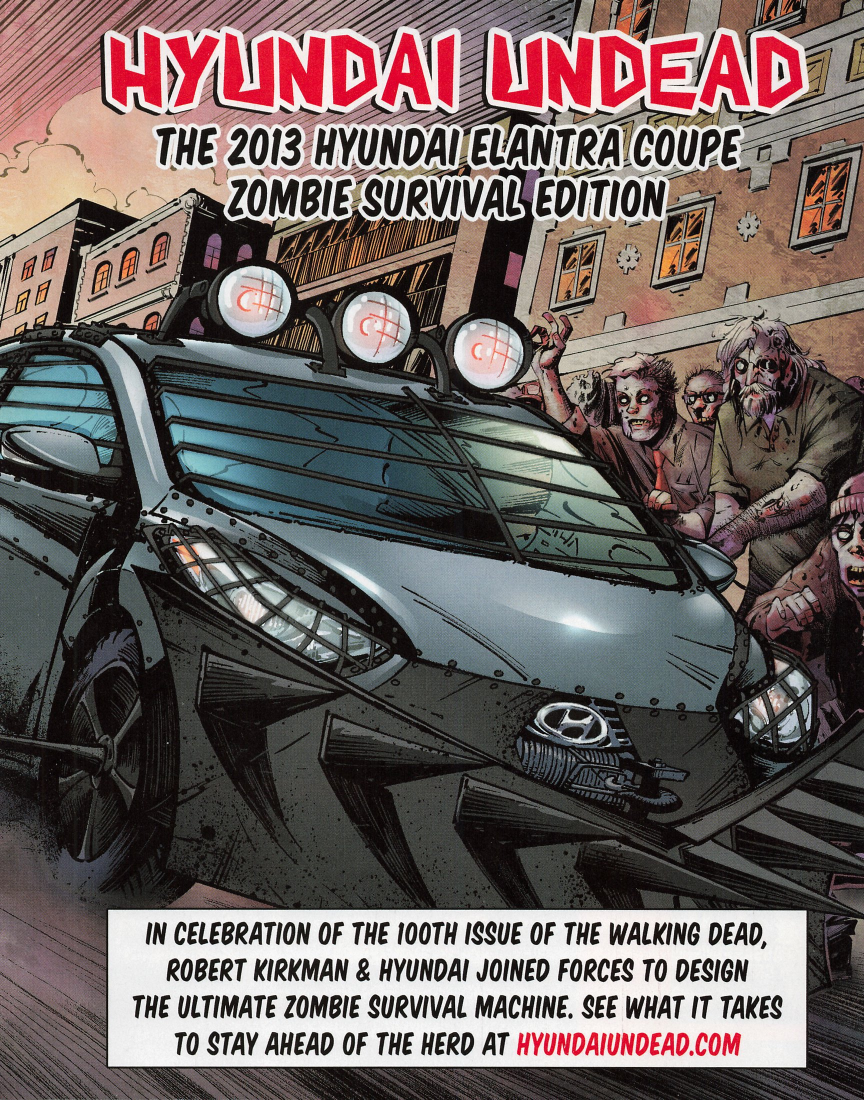

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SEPTEMBER 2012

COVER FEATURE

50 **ASSASSIN'S CREED III**
Two Assassins are on their way and they're bringing new toys of the deadly variety. We promise you don't want to be on their bad sides.

ON THE COVER

PS3 | PSP | PS VITA
PlayStation The Official Magazine
14 FRESH IDEAS
REVIEWED!
IN ASSASSINS WE TRUST
ASSASSIN'S CREED III
The revolution continues on PS3 and Vita
SPLINTER CELL DEAD SPACE 3 STAR WARS 1313 NEED FOR SPEED

Assassin's Creed III **Page 50**

14 Fresh Ideas **Page 66**

Spec Ops: The Line **Page 78**

The Amazing Spider-Man **Page 82**

FEATURES FOCUS

60 **SHUHEI YOSHIDA**
We chat with Sony Worldwide Studios' president to discuss life and games (mostly games).

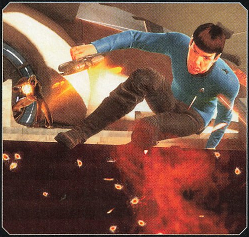
66 **NEW BLOOD**
These impressive new IPs show us there is hope for a future beyond franchise sequels.

THE BIG 10

Star Wars 1313 8
Warren Spector Interview 10
E3 No Shows 11
DUST 514 14
Final Fantasy XIV 16
Papo & Yo 17
Move hits Portal 2 and Okami 20
Wonderbook 21
Readers' Most Wanted 21
The Great Debate 22

PREVIEWS

Dead Space 3 24
Need for Speed: Most Wanted 28
Splinter Cell: Blacklist 32
DmC: Devil May Cry 33
Borderlands 2 34
Persona 4 Golden 35
007 Legends 35
Transformers: Fall of Cybertron 36
Medal of Honor: Warfighter 38



LittleBigPlanet Vita 40
Star Trek: The Game 41
Metro: Last Light 42
Crysis 3 44
Worms Revolution 45
Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time 45
Aliens: Colonial Marines 46
Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2 46
Damage Inc.: Pacific Squadron 47
Anarchy Reigns 47
Latest On 48

FEATURES

Assassin's Creed III 50
So you say you want a revolution...
Shuhei Yoshida 60
He's got the whole World in his hands...
New Blood 66
The future's so bright, we gotta wear shades...

REVIEWS

Spec Ops: The Line 78
The Amazing Spider-Man 82
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes 83
LEGO Batman 2 Vita 83
Quantum Conundrum 84
Resident Evil Chronicles HD Coll. 85
Metal Gear Solid HD Collection 85
NCAA Football 13 86
Record of Agarest War 2 86
Unchained Blades 87
Jeremy McGrath's Offroad 87
Babel Rising 87
DLC Roundup 87

DEPARTMENTS

Ed Note 4
Calendar 6
Blu-ray 88
Want That 90
Mail 92
PSN Directory/VDS 94
In the Mood for... 96

24 DEAD SPACE 3

Despite being a step away from the survival horror we're accustomed to in a *Dead Space* game, we still have high hopes for the latest entry and its new co-op campaign.

78 SPEC OPS: THE LINE

We laughed (uncomfortably), we cried (not really), and we questioned our own morality.

Sudden Impact

Lingering impressions that managed to survive E3

I'm still recovering (mentally and physically) from E3 2012. The show—and the numerous announcements and reveals that come out of it—is always professionally interesting to me, but there are only a few games each year that really make an impression on me. Here are three from this year's show.

Assassin's Creed III Since it's on our cover this month, it's obvious that I'm hugely excited by this game. But being a bit of a history buff, I love the fact the *Creed* franchise continues to explore some of humanity's most interesting eras. A game set during the Revolutionary War just seems so much more intriguing than another imagined sci-fi or modern combat zone.

The Last of Us Naughty Dog's new adventure seems to be at the center of the recent upswing in complaints about the level of violence in games. But after years of being desensitized by absurd depictions of hacking, slashing, and fragging, I was surprised by the response that *The Last of Us's* raw, immediate violence elicited from me. For the first time in a long time I actually winced when a bad guy's head got bashed in. Call it an escalation if you will, but to me it shows that games are now beginning to deliver a meaningful experience that's not so easy to dismiss as mere caricature.

Star Wars 1313 I admit it, I'm one of those curmudgeons who believes George Lucas defiled what was once a beautiful and pure creation. As such, I've long considered *Star Wars* games (the few decent ones) a victory of style over substance and execution. Which is why *Star Wars 1313* came as such a surprise. It is simply *gorgeous* to look at, and a mature-themed *Star Wars* game?! Why, the next thing you know, they'll have Han shooting Greedo first.

R.g

Roger Burchill
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twitter.com/RogerPTOM

Dan Fitzpatrick
Art Director
twitter.com/danfpatrick

If Dan Fitzpatrick has any extraordinary skills, he's not telling. Maybe secret-keeping is his superpower? We did see him fly once, but that could have been a trick of the light.

Mikel Reparaz
Executive Editor
twitter.com/Wikiparaz

Fun fact, Mikel Reparaz was born in 2002 but when he was 5 he wished he could be "all growed up." He's actually only 10, which makes his beard even more impressive.

Scott Butterworth
Senior Editor
twitter.com/ScottPTOM

When a radioactive hipster bit Scott Butterworth, he developed the ability to be completely disinterested in everything except irony. Now the rest of the staff has to deal with it everyday.

Anne Lewis
Assistant Editor
twitter.com/BDRAnneLewis

Any time Anne Lewis is near a computer, vacuum, watch, or iPod, it breaks. This makes life hard, but telling herself it's a superpower makes her feel better about herself.

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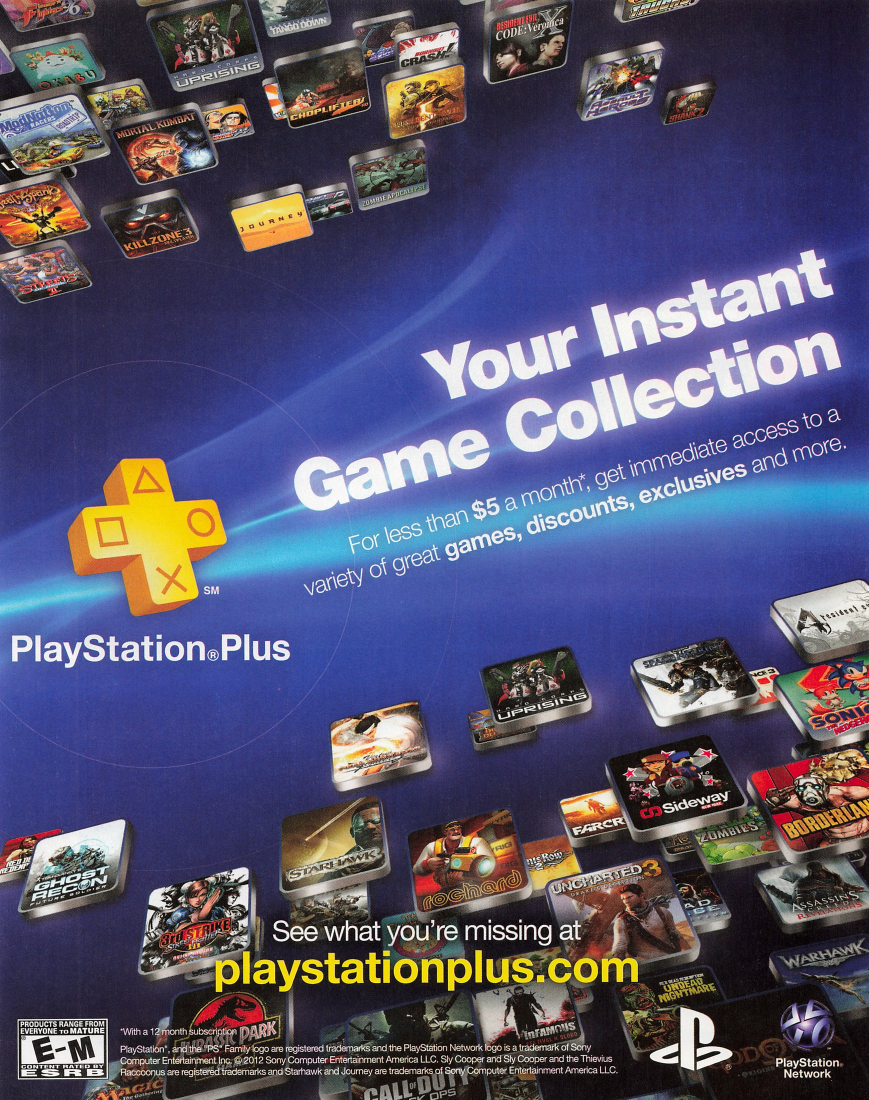

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OKABU
HARD CORPS UPRISING
CRASH
ModNation RACERS ROADTRIP
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SHANK 2
ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE
JOURNEY
KILLZONE 3 MULTIPLAYER
resident evil 4
SPACE MARINE
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
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The PlayStation Entertainment Plan

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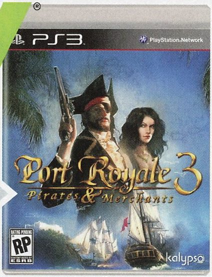


SEP 03

Place Bid
eBay launched on this date in 1995, leading us to spend far too much time and money fighting other users for useless crap.

04

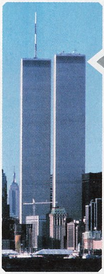
Avast Ye, Maties!
Arrgh, we not be certain what to expect from *Port Royale 3*, settin' sail this date. But we be likin' the idea of naval battles with our grand pirate ship! Who be with us?

07

Every Flavor Blu-ray
Would-be wizards will be pleased to know the Blu-ray *Harry Potter Wizard's Collection* is out today. It contains all the films and comes in a cool box and everything!

09

Sweet 17
If the PSone were a person it would be in its senior year of high school. We would be helping it look at colleges and buying its graduation robes. Happy 17th birthday, dear!



11

9/11
We're taking a break from bad puns today to solemnly remember the events that took place on September 11, 2001.
In Stores *Tekken Tag Tournament 2, NHL 13*

14

Payback's a Biatch
Yeah, we're thinking *Resident Evil: Retribution* has "travesty" written all over it. But someone has to watch it, and that'll likely be us.

18

Wub Wub This
The day has finally come for us to find a gajillion guns and destroy everything in our path. That's right, *Borderlands 2* is here at last.

PS3
PlayStation Network
BORDERLANDS 2
RP
gearbox
2K GAMES

WARNING!
IF THE HELP DESK THINKS YOUR QUESTION IS STUPID, WE WILL SET YOU ON FIRE

22

International Rabbit Day
Today is International Rabbit Day, or as it's known to those who suffer from leporiphobia, "Oh God, why? Why are there so many pictures of rabbits everywhere?"

23

Props to the Competition
On this date in 1889, Fusajiro Yamauchi founded Nintendo Koppai (yes, *that* Nintendo) to produce the playing card game Hanafuda. The rest, as they say, is history.

MARVEL'S AVENGERS

25

Assemble!
The Avengers is out on Blu-ray in both 2D and 3D today. We can't wait to watch The Hulk punch that space whale in stunning high definition.
In Stores: *Dead or Alive 5, Family Guy: Back to the Multiverse*

28

Ask a Stupid Question Day
Why aren't all states square? Is a circle a geometric shape? What's the meaning of life? Every day is Ask a Stupid Question Day here at the PTOM office.

*Release dates are subject to change by the publishers. PSone photo by Evan-Amos

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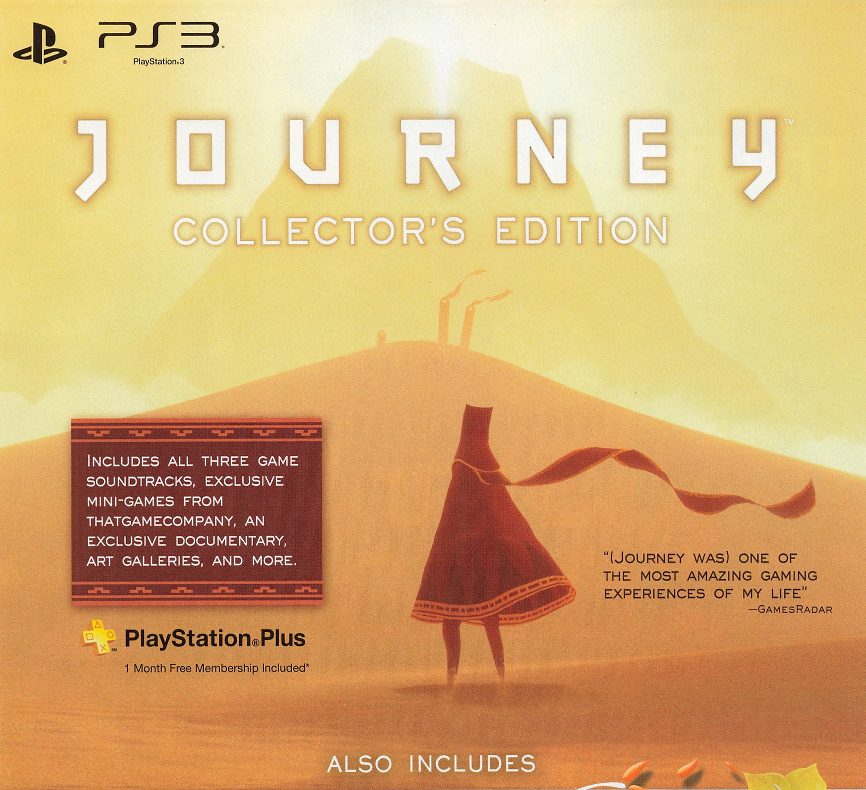

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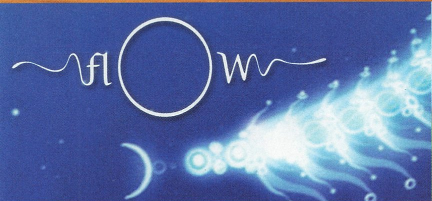

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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

Missing In Action
GTA V was an E3 no-show, but the money trail says it's on its way.
▸▸Page 11

Join the Family
Learn how *EVE Online* players are getting ready for *DUST 514*.
▸▸Page 14

Back on Its Feet
Final Fantasy XIV producer on revamping the maligned MMO.
▸▸Page 16

Back to Testing
Portal 2: In Motion DLC adds new levels, Move support, and more.
▸▸Page 20

The Great Debate
PTOM and GamesRadar.com eds violently disagree on games violence.
▸▸Page 22

1

Star Wars 1313

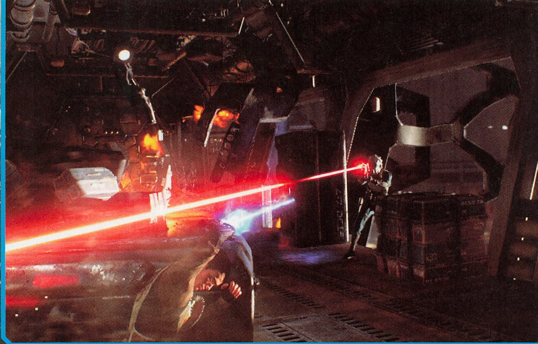
A grittier, mature-themed Star Wars game enters Uncharted territory

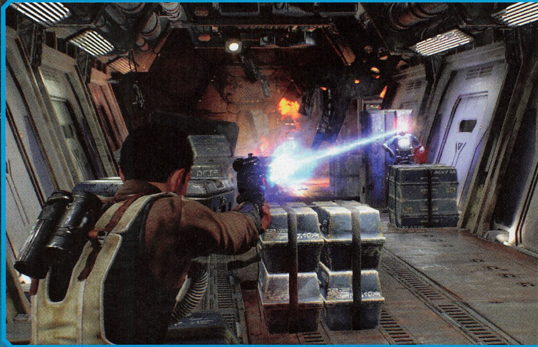
The Force is strong in this one. Our first early look at *Star Wars 1313* revealed the eye-popping visuals we associate with the franchise's films, but little in the way of familiar stories and characters from the canon. Set on or—perhaps more aptly—beneath the capital world of Coruscant, *1313* delves into the seamy criminal enterprise that thrives on the 1,313th subterranean level of the planet. Neither the Jedi nor the Sith rule here as we assume the role of a yet-unnamed bounty hunter entering the ruthless underworld. Along with the apparent absence of iconic characters like Luke, Vader, and even *The Force Unleashed's* Starkiller, there's a move away from the franchise's black-and-white morality system, with LucasArts promising a storyline and decision-making structure that focuses on shades of gray.

In the demo we experienced, our bounty hunter and an associate began the descent to level 1313 in a cargo ship. We had no inkling whether our character was "good" or "bad," but it mattered little when the ship subsequently became a hijacking target—or was it an assassination attempt on our "hero"? The ensuing sequence could have been ripped straight from a *Star Wars* movie; as the cargo ship began to disintegrate, the action played out as agile third-person cover combat mixed with precise platforming gameplay between flaming sections of the ship as it came apart. It even took a while for us to realize that this was no cutscene we were witnessing, but an actual playthrough. It had us immediately thinking "*Uncharted* in space," but with much better graphics.

Force Powers

What can't be communicated adequately in words is the sheer visual impact of the game segment we witnessed. *1313* is the first LucasArts game that





combines the technical know-how of movie production powerhouses Industrial Light & Magic, Lucasfilm Animation, and Skywalker Sound. The character-capturing tech in particular is a generational leap, as it moves beyond merely recreating body movement and integrates recreating human expression—so much so that even the slightest innocuous eye twitch is now seamlessly preserved in the character representation. Combine that with the particle and lighting effects that appear to perfectly recreate the flames and smoke of the cargo ship as it's destroyed, and it becomes easy to understand why we were initially skeptical that what we were observing was gameplay.

The real question, however, then becomes whether what we witnessed was something that can be recreated on PS3. The demo itself was running on a PC with a top-flight graphics card, and with LucasArts being somewhat vague in stating that the game was coming to "consoles" (but refusing to specify *which* consoles) there was immediate conjecture that *Star Wars 1313* may actually be our first glimpse of a next-gen (read: PS4) game.

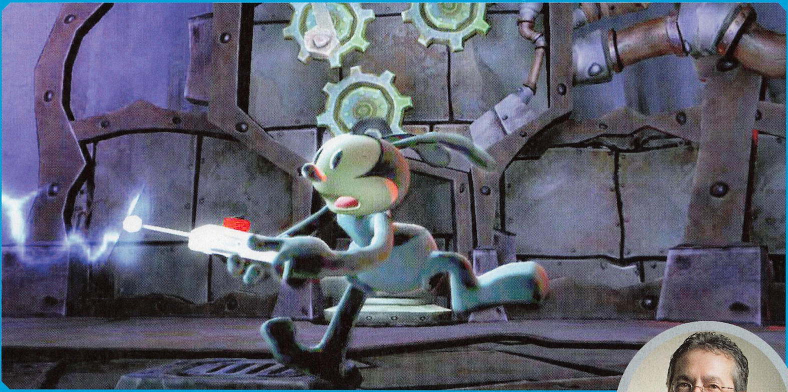
LucasArts was also non-committal on a potential release date for the game, but we're thinking that 2013 would be a marketing match made in heaven considering all the other 13s on parade in the game's title. Regardless of when *1313* finally arrives, we're already salivating over the prospect of the game's visual orgy and the more visceral experience a mature-themed *Star Wars* title promises. It's the kind of reaction that a stoic Jedi master might not approve of, but we were getting a little tired of all those emotion-stifling rules anyway.

"Let's not see anything in a cutscene that we'd rather be playing."

—*LucasArts'* Star Wars 1313 *design mantra*

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about



2 Spector Speaks

Famed Deus Ex developer Warren Spector talks choice, consequences, and Epic Mickey 2

***Epic Mickey 2* is now heading to PS3 instead of just Wii. Has that changed the design process?**
It hasn't changed the process at all. It's the same game on all platforms. I will go to my grave not understanding why people think you have to create a different experience for different hardware. There's a story I want to tell with—not to, *with*—players, and there is an experience we want players to have. What does change is obviously the graphical fidelity with which we can render the world and the characters in it. We knew that we couldn't just up-res the graphics for those platforms or down-res the graphics from those platforms. All the geometry is new. All the textures are new. All the sound is new. Everything.

What's going to set this sequel apart from the original?
The big thing we want to add is two-player co-op. Before we even started working on the first game, I kind of had planned out four story arcs. I do that for everything. I had a three-game story arc for *Deus Ex*. I knew what kind of innovation I was going to introduce in the second game and in the third game. The interesting thing is, that's all I wanted to do, but the team and the design director Chase Jones came to me and said, "I don't just want to do two-player co-op. I want to do Oswald A.I. In single-player, I want Oswald to be there every step of the way." I told them to go ahead and do it, and sure enough, it's working really well.

***Epic Mickey* seems like an outlier compared to games like *System Shock* and *Deus Ex*. How does it fit into your career?**
The hallmark of all games I've made—at least in my mind—is the idea of choice and consequence. What you do makes a difference, and you get to decide how to interact with the world, how to interact with characters, what quests to take or not take, how you solve those quests. In *Disney Epic Mickey*, we try to introduce [that idea]. When you change something in *Disney Epic Mickey 2*, it's forever unless you decide to go back and change it yourself.

Why do you feel this active participation idea is so important?
In 1978, I played *D&D* for the first time. I sat down with six friends and realized for the first time in my life I am not being told a story, and I am not interpreting someone else's story. We were, together, creating a story. I have spent my entire life trying to recreate the feeling I had at that moment, because that felt so good. Every human being on the planet becoming a storyteller is hugely powerful. Games are the first medium that I encountered and, I believe, the first medium in the history of humankind that makes that possible.

3 Grand Theft Spotlight

Grand Theft Auto V was an E3 no-show, but it's coming sooner than later

No *Grand Theft Auto V* at E3? Don't worry too much. While *GTA's* no-show might have disappointed some, there are a few simple points to consider here. Historically speaking, Rockstar just does not *do* E3, not even to show off its most popular games. They're so big an event in themselves that they don't need the media circus of E3 in order to grab press attention, and exposing *GTA V* to that feeding frenzy would simply work to its detriment.

Plus, consider the fact that *Max Payne 3* is still currently hogging the limelight. With the PC version only just having arrived on June 1 (following the announcement of a massive six-month DLC schedule), there's still plenty more promotion to be done. Rockstar loves to give its games a long publicity tail-end (remember *Red Dead Redemption's* DLC?), and there's no way it will self-cannibalize for press coverage.

Still, don't expect too long a wait for more *GTA V* information. While the biggest rumored release dates have landed everywhere from "any day now" to "May 2013," October-to-early-spring is likely. Why? Let's look at the cold numbers: Rockstar's parent company 2K recently held an investor call and predicted a total of roughly $1.85 billion in revenues between now and May 2013. Rockstar is expected to return $1.1 billion of that (roughly 60% of the total), while 2K Games will deliver the rest. The report admits that Max Payne 3 is budgeted to deliver $300 million, while sales of back-catalog games (*Red Dead, LA Noire, GTA IV*, etc.) will account for another $150 million.

So...where do they see that other $650 million coming from under the Rockstar label? The answer is, of course, *GTA V*. It's the only announced game on Rockstar's schedule, and the only game big enough to haul in $650 million between now and May 2013. The only question is, will the game arrive before or after Christmas? October or April (the two major release slots Rockstar has occupied in the past)?

If we were talking about any other game, we'd say April 2013, since Rockstar has yet to show the press a sniff of the game actually running. However, it's entirely possible Rockstar is simply waiting to clear away *Max Payne 3*, and once that's done, we could see plenty of *GTA V*. Although *GTA IV* released in April (like *Red Dead* and *L.A. Noire*), it was originally planned for October 2007. Rockstar has always aimed for pre-Christmas with *GTA*, and they won't be scared of *Call of Duty* like other publishers. So, worst case it's April next year, best case October 2012, but either way, don't anticipate waiting deep into 2013.

Other E3 MIAs

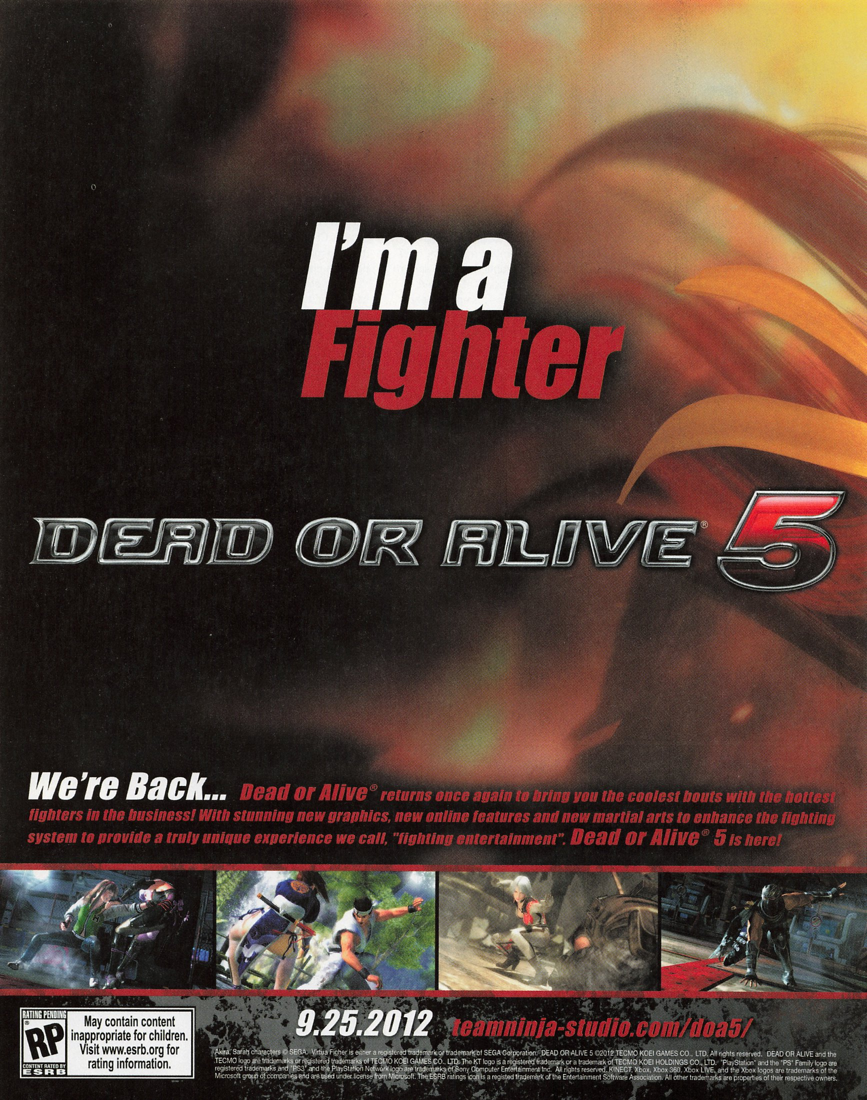
BioShock Infinite

It's not that the game isn't ready to be shown, it's that the team doesn't want it overexposed. Expect it to release in February 2013 as planned.

The Last Guardian

Every time this game comes up, Sony maintains it has *not* been cancelled and will launch when it's perfect. We certainly hope so.

There's a $650 million gap in 2K's expected earnings. Where do you think that'll come from?



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CONTENT RATED BY
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4

Eve of Conflict

PC Gamer's Josh Augustine reveals how EVE players are preparing for DUST 514

EVE Online players are disturbing, and before PS3 gamers enter their dominion when *DUST 514* launches later this year, there are a few things to know about them.

As a Senior Editor for *PC Gamer*, I've had the pleasure (and sometimes extreme discomfort) of living amongst this special breed of gamer for the past several years. I've taken shots with them at Icelandic bars during their annual player convention. I've woken up at four in the morning with them to launch a fleet attack when our enemy was least prepared. I've watched them suicide-bomb entire sectors of space just to inflate the prices of specific goods in the game's dynamic economy. I've overheard them plotting to troll PS3 players.

This is the world you're stepping into with *DUST 514*, the free-to-play sci-fi online shooter being developed exclusively for PS3 by the same people that made *EVE Online*. It's a world filled with creative players who've been told for years that they can do anything they want—and actually have.

Unlike a lot of PC MMOs, *EVE Online* takes place in a single version of the universe, which makes the gamers feel a bit more like a family—a big, messy space family that's constantly fighting, bickering, and

Know Your History Four defining *EVE Online* moments

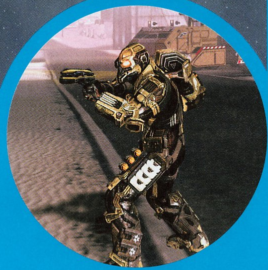
1 **April 2005: The ultimate betrayal**
Hired assassins spend months infiltrating their target's corporation. Once they control every level of the organization, they murder the owner and steal the most powerful ships in the galaxy.

2 **May 2008: An inside job**
The president of the player-created EVE Intergalactic Bank transfers all of its assets to his personal account. He escapes with hundreds of thousands of real-world dollars.

3 **June 2011: Hostage crisis**
To protest changes in an expansion, thousands of players fly into the Jita system and fire on its main space station, threatening to crash the servers until CCP meets their demands.

4 **April 2012: Burn it all**
The infamous Goonswarm alliance buys up cheap items in bulk and then destroys the player-run infrastructure that makes them. Thousands of suicide bombers destroy hundreds of player ships and hold Jita for several days.

There are plenty of enterprising players in *EVE*, and they have a proposition: work for them in *DUST*, and they'll make you rich.



backstabbing each other. They're eager to welcome newcomers into the fold, but you'll have to endure some good ol' fashioned hazing first.

John Zastrow told me a bit about the plans his Alliance, the infamous Goonswarm, is already cooking up: "Our market wizards are looking ahead to see how they can go about destroying the *DUST 514* markets with their piles of *EVE* ISK [in-game currency]."

These are the same self-made economists that orchestrated the "Burn Jita" campaign (see boxout, left), so this is no idle threat. Zastrow won't reveal the specifics of their plans, but he assures me that, with the games' shared economy, "We can use our massive piles of space bux to buy cool tanks and stuff with which to grief *DUST 514* newbies. I tingle with excitement when I think of having an entire new community of people to mess with."

Looking for Work?

Not everyone is out to get you, though. There are plenty of enterprising businessmen in *EVE Online* more interested in making a profit than making enemies—and they've got a proposition: Work for them on the *DUST* side of the galaxy, and they'll make you rich.

PS3 gamers are going to live in the same galaxy, so it makes sense to team up. The interaction between *DUST* and *EVE* will be modest at first, but there will be shared chat channels, a single economy with cross-game markets for buying and selling goods, and the ability to ally with existing *EVE* corporations.

Everything in *EVE's* galaxy can be controlled by corporations, and *DUST* players will be able to help control them by battling on temperate planets around the galaxy. Wherever you win, you contribute to your faction's claim on that solar system.

It's a simple equation for *EVE* players trying to recruit you. Your success = money + power for them. When *EVE* players own a solar system, they're able to pull money out of it in various ways, and *DUST* players that prove their effectiveness and reliablity will earn a reputation and be highly sought after.

Many *EVE* groups are already looking to team up with *DUST* players to ensure their borders are safe, but some are going so far as to recruit professional FPS gamers to fight their battles for them.

Demand a Pay Raise

But the most important thing to know about *EVE* players before striking a deal with them is that they cannot be trusted. They've proven that time and time again with shady business deals and backstabbing antics that regularly make headlines inside *PC Gamer* magazine.

Sure, *EVE* players have the ability to rain real-time orbital strikes down on *DUST* maps to help PS3 players succeed, but don't rely on it—they might be plotting to screw you over.

Luckily, there are tools to deal with those meddling spaceships in the sky. Some *DUST* maps house facilities that can fire giant missiles into the planet's orbit to take out *EVE Online* ships wandering too close for comfort.

This is only the beginning. *EVE Online* players are going to become your crazy new family—get ready to fight, barter, and backstab with the best of 'em. But remember, you've been warned.

5

Final Fantasy XIV 2.0

Exec producer Naoki Yoshida on improving the shaky MMO for PS3

It's no secret that *Final Fantasy XIV's* debut on PC wasn't well received. Can the game recover from that stigma?
Well, two things. Firstly, we're not going to give up—we're committed to not giving up on this. The launch certainly didn't go as smoothly as we hoped it would, and we also understand that it's tough to rebuild consumer trust. But by taking the original version and telling the people who are still playing "we're not going to give up on you—in fact, we'll continue updating what we have and make it better," we're showing our dedication to rebuilding the game and its community. We want to continue that sort of communication with the players. One thing that's shown we've regained this trust is that player numbers have actually increased since we started monthly billing.

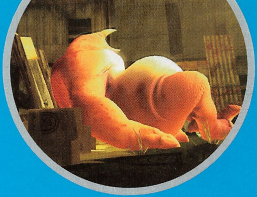
The other thing is that it'd be easy to just spend money heavily marketing the new version of the game, but we feel that what's even more important is for players to experience it themselves and give feedback. That's what the upcoming alpha and beta tests will be for.

Why do you think MMORPGS have been a tough sell on consoles?
One of the main reasons why MMOs fail to take off on consoles is the [user interface]. How do you translate something designed for a mouse and keyboard to a console? The first thing you have to do is make sure that the overall UI will fit into a console's control scheme. The other issue, perhaps unique to *FFXIV*, is that console gamers have a pre-established image of *Final Fantasy* based on other console *FF* games they've played. To make an MMO game experience that feels like an *FF* game, we've re-thought the beginning portions of the game, and made it easier for new players who don't have MMO experience to dive into it. It will feel more like a traditional *Final Fantasy*—a new, numbered title in the series—than the image new players might have of a typical MMO.

PSN is a free service. How do you plan to convince players that *FFXIV* is worth an additional monthly bill?
Like many other MMOs, we are offering a free first month of play. We're hoping that this first month will show players that, yes, this is a game worth paying a subscription fee for. That's our job here—convincing you, the player, that we have a product worth that extra money.

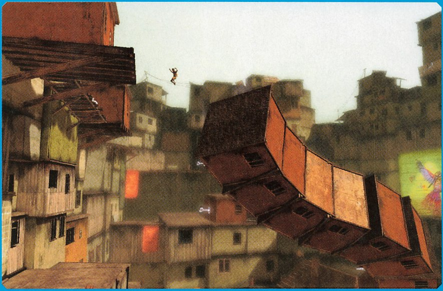
From a technical standpoint, how will the PS3 version compare to *FFXIV* running on a high-end PC?
We've designed a totally customizable graphics engine for version 2.0. This new engine allows us to cater to high- and low-end PCs, as well as PS3 users. Basically, we expressly had the PS3 in mind when creating this graphics engine. It's not going to be "the PS3 version looks like crap," instead, it'll be "the PS3 version looks great, while the version on an expensive, top-level gaming PC looks even better." On a PC, you might see 30 to 40 characters onscreen at once, while the PS3 will display fewer, for example. We're actually designing some of the content around the PS3, too—such as the instance-based combat made for certain numbers of players. That way, we won't even have to worry about hitting the wall of the PS3's limitations, and it'll wind up looking almost identical on both platforms in many cases.

6 Papo & Yo



Exploring family hardships and addiction through a monstrous metaphor

Minority Media founder Vander Caballero based *Papo & Yo* on his own tumultuous childhood, with the Monster standing in for his alcoholic father.

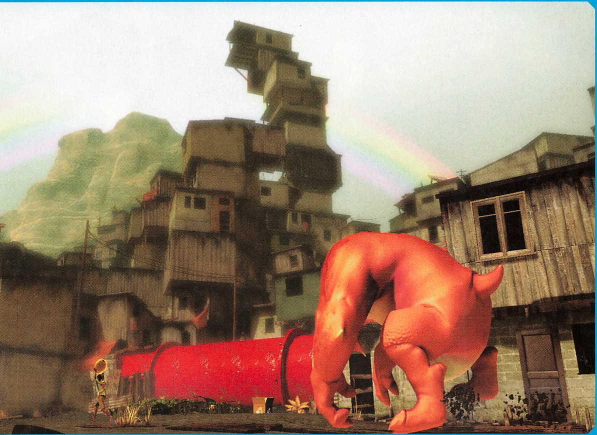


Vander Caballero doesn't want us to feel powerful while we play his game, *Papo & Yo*. In fact, he wants the opposite. "Games right now give you more and more powerful stuff. You get bigger and bigger," he says. "I want you to feel weak."

His game is a metaphor for a young boy dealing with the problems of having an alcoholic father, so it's not exactly the happiest tale. "It's a terrible story," says Caballero. It's also immensely personal. Representing his own father, the Monster in *Papo & Yo* is hopelessly addicted to small, orange fruits. The Monster's companion is a small boy tasked with helping him do, well, just about everything. Taken at face value, it's a pleasant platformer. Taken in context, however, it's a powerful message about addiction and its effects on family life.

However, Caballero wants to be able to express himself in a way that doesn't make people not want to play his game. "If you scare people away, you didn't achieve your goal of making an engaging experience in which people will want to feel these emotions." It's his goal to make *Papo & Yo* something that people will enjoy playing, even if it makes them a bit sad.

There's a great mixture of melancholy atmosphere and childlike wonder in Caballero's design. During our time with the game, we were asked to build a bridge to a higher platform by stacking small houses on top of one another and leaning them over to create a path. The solution was charming, inventive, and the sort of thing that only really makes sense in the mind of a kid, as we sent the houses to the tower by way of turning windup-toy keys and watching them fly away.



While we were building our bridge, however, the monster was still there, binging on fruit below us. It wasn't until we moved his fruit to where we wanted him to go that he actually followed it, and by extension us. Watching a little boy help an immensely powerful monster get to where it needs to be is an oddly affecting thing to witness.

As we play through *Papo & Yo*, we begin to lose articles of clothing, going from a well-dressed teenager to a scraggly, half-naked boy. "You feel uncomfortable every time you lose a piece of clothing," says Caballero. "I think that feeling uncomfortable is good, because then [the players] gain their power back by their actions. We take away, but then give back as the player makes their way through the game and get better at it."

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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

7

New Moves

Some old favorites get a Moving new twist

Brush Stroke of Genius

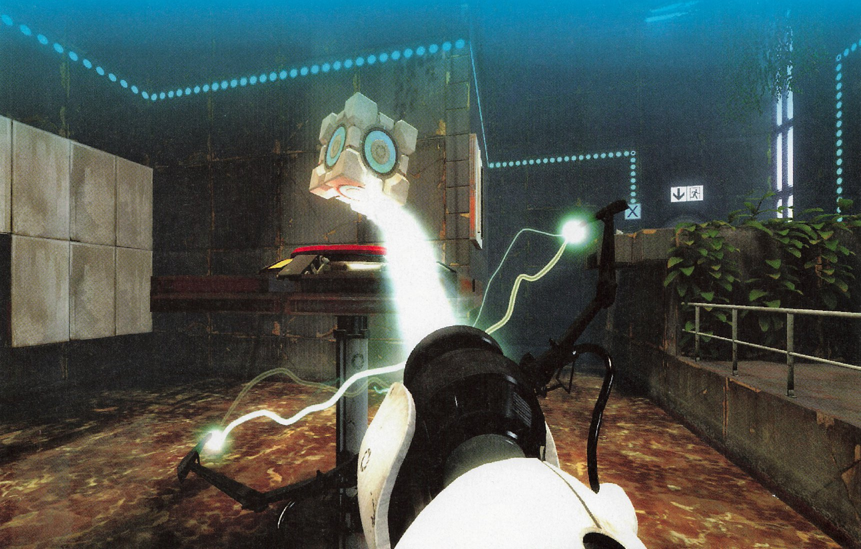
We won't lie. The news that *Okami HD* is coming to PSN this fall for only $19.99 *and* that it will be fully Move compatible makes us openly weep tears of happiness.

The Aperture Science Handheld Portal Device will learn a few new tricks in the *Portal 2: In Motion* DLC. The DLC will add new levels and game mechanics for *Portal* fans to enjoy, as well as Move support. There's no new story content, but developer Sixense does hope to release a free Move patch for *Portal 2* at the same time as the DLC.

Among the new additions is a Portal Surfing mechanic, which allows us to move and rotate portals even after we've placed them—particularly useful when trying to spread gel across a surface. We'll also be able to use Move's 1:1 capabilities to grab a cube or enemy, and stretch our arm out toward the game to place more distance between the object and us. If there's a button just out of reach, we can simply extend our arm forward and activate it.

Perhaps our favorite add-on is the ability to stretch and pull certain cubes using the Scaling function. By holding the shoulder button on the navigation controller and pulling the Move controller sideways, we can grow the cube and use it as a shield against turrets, or shrink it and slide it through a malfunctioning door.

The new gameplay mechanics won't be accessible in the original story, but we *will* be able to go through the entire game utilizing Move controls. There's currently no firm release date or announced price for *In Motion*, but Sixense is hoping to release the DLC and the Move patch sometime this year.



8 Spellbound

Wonderbook peripheral brings reading—and the Harry Potter universe—to life

With the focus of the past few weeks on the hardcore titles like *Beyond: Two Souls* and *The Last of Us*, Sony's other recent announcement: the new Wonderbook peripheral, may have gone unnoticed by many. Yes, it pairs with PlayStation Move, but the first release for this augmented reality accessory is from none other than JK Rowling—*and* it's Potter-related.

"[Rowling] saw Wonderbook and she was really excited about it," says Sony creative services manager Dave Raynard. "She had an idea about spell books, and the two things just seemed to fit really well." News of Wonderbook may not elevate the heart rate of hardcore gamers, but it's hard not to be impressed by the potential that the Potter universe may bring to expanding Move's appeal with the casual, younger, and huge Potter-phile demographics.

Book of Spells, the first Wonderbook title—from the restricted section of the Hogwarts library, no less—is packed with dragons, wand-waving minigames to teach spells, and new stories of the history of each incantation. Augmented-reality symbols create an entirely new kind of pop-up book, as sparks and magical creatures fly from the on-screen pages. It's an exciting new level of interaction that brings Harry's world to life, and all directly from the mind of the internationally bestselling author.

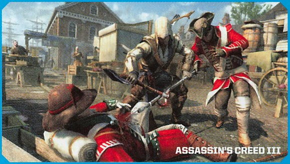
Famously protective of her boy wizard, Rowling's influence wasn't just restricted to one brainstorm, either.

"She's been really interesting and creative," enthused Raynard. "It's an incredible opportunity to work with somebody like JK Rowling. She even brought her husband to the last meeting because she wanted to show it to him, which we felt was a wonderful vote of confidence."

If Rowling is excited, then we might be clearing space in front of our TVs later this year as well.

9 The Readers' Most Wanted

Soon after its announcement, the Vita-bound *Call of Duty: Black Ops Classified* jumped high up our list, resulting in two *Black Ops* games in the top five. *The Last of Us* is once again coveted by our readers after being absent last issue, and *Borderlands 2* has ended its five-month streak on the list—we suspect it won't take long to come back. Our top three remain strong, though the lack of new information on *Grand Theft Auto V* may start to cause a slip in the ranks.



ASSASSIN'S CREED III

01 *Call of Duty: Black Ops II*
02 *Assassin's Creed III*
03 *Grand Theft Auto V*
04 *Call of Duty: Black Ops Declassified*
05 *God of War: Ascension*
06 *Resident Evil 6*
07 *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection*
08 *Madden NFL 13*
09 *BioShock Infinite*
10 *DmC: Devil May Cry*
11 *The Amazing Spider-Man*
12 *NBA 2K13*
13 *NBA Live 13*
14 *Saints Row: The Third - Enter the Dominatrix*
15 *Ratchet & Clank Collection*
16 *The Last of Us*
17 *Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time*
18 *Medal of Honor: Warfighter*
19 *Tekken Tag Tournament 2*
20 *WWE '13*

DEVIL MAY CRY

THE LAST OF US

Stats in this chart appear courtesy of Ipsos OTX MediaCT's GamePlan Insights. All games are PS3 titles. Polling data was tabulated on June 19, 2012.

10 Are games really getting more violent?

And is that a bad thing? Editors from PTOM and GamesRadar.com weigh in

No

Says the bloodthirsty **Mikel Reparez**

After the dust settled from E3 in June, I noticed something new: editorials from colleagues proclaiming that this year, the industry had *gone too far*. The ultraviolence on display was just too much for their delicate sensibilities, and they vented their disgust at everything from *Tomb Raider's* perceived torture-porn slant to the shotgun-blast exclamation point at the end of the demo for *The Last of Us*.

Hey guys, have we been covering the same industry? Because in the one where I work, bloodshed and gore have been part of the landscape for years. And while it's arguable a greater number of violent games than usual took center stage this year, their individual level of violence is nothing new.

Dig deeper, and you'll see the real objection here isn't to violence—many of these same critics have been happily exploding heads in *Mortal Kombat* and *Fallout* for years—it's to the context in which that violence is presented. *The Last of Us* is visually no more gruesome than other M-rated games, but when we're faced with an enemy convincingly *begging for his life*, as the bandit tried to do at the end of *The Last of Us's* demo, the gore is no longer confined to a fun cartoon. Now it's uncomfortably real, because we're suddenly forced to identify with our victim. And if a game can do that to an audience of jaded critics, then I call that game a staggering achievement.

Yes

Says the tender **Hollander Cooper**

Whoa, settle down there. No one's going to take away your blood-covered DualShock! You're sort of downplaying the real issue here: the lack of context is actually a pretty big deal. Some of the biggest games shown off at E3—*The Last of Us*, *Tomb Raider*, and *God of War: Ascension*—were all so obsessed with displaying how bloody they could be that they missed giving us any reason for the brutality. We don't need an epic poem, but we got so little that it was hard to understand what was actually going on.

Instead of presenting us with likable characters first and then showing the dire straits they've being put through, we saw how much blood they could blood while wading through neck-deep oceans of blood. The *Tomb Raider* demo was essentially a super-cut of Lara Croft being smashed against the ground and stabbed in the abdomen for five minutes, and all we saw from *The Last of Us* was a guy with a beard bashing the heads of bandits with rocks while a teenage girl screamed.

And the *God of War: Ascension* demo? We didn't get a second of plot information; Kratos took the stage, ripped open an elephant-man's head with his Blades of Chaos, and stabbed into his brain. I don't care about the amount of violence, I care about the amount of stuff in those demos that *wasn't* violent. There was no setup; it was all punchline. I don't know to say "who's there?" if no one says "knock knock" first.

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Previews

Quick Pitch

A New Frontier

Dead Space 3 adds a cover system, human enemies, snow, and... Wait, is this still *Dead Space*?

Hear You Scream

John Carver joins the roster as a playable foil for Isaac. Feel like tackling the campaign together?

Handle the Truth

The developers at Visceral Studios promise story-related answers are finally coming.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **February 2013** Pub **EA** Dev **Visceral Studios**

Dead Space 3

A little less "space" but still plenty of room to grow

Well, here we are again, crouched carefully behind a piece of chest-high cover, periodically leaning out to pick off one enemy soldier at a time with our ammo-rich assault rifle as our co-op buddy barks orders from behind a snowy embankment. It's a situation we've faced many times before. Yet despite the general familiarity of the circumstances, the scenario feels somehow...*alien*. Maybe it's the giant ice spider we took down just moments before, or it could be the massive, out-of-control drill we'll encounter just a few more minutes into our demo, but whatever the cause of our asiness, this is not the *Dead Space* we remember.

That is not to say, however, that it's *bad*. Just as *Dead Space 2* took a confident stride away from survival-horror and planted one foot firmly in the action-adventure camp, *Dead Space 3* looks to further evolve the experience. "This is [protagonist Isaac Clarke's] third go-around," explains Visceral Studios head honcho Steve Papoutsis. "He's a lot more capable. So it made a lot of sense to us to add the ideas you saw today. The cover and the piece with the co-op were really about reaching more people."

And despite the new terrestrial setting, the additional automatic weapons (complete with "universal ammo"), and the option to play through the entire campaign cooperatively, Papoutsis is quick to point out that the same blood still pumps through *Dead Space's* frozen veins: "You'll still have your single-player experience that people have come to expect from a *Dead Space* game, with the same level of atmosphere and intensity that fans of single-player will want. Our co-op, however, will unlock additional content in the game."

Naturally, the man knows what he's talking about. We witnessed firsthand that *DS3's* campaign works just fine whether we're playing alone or with a buddy, and if our frayed nerves are any indication, the game is still plenty

▸▸

The devs promise that Isaac's still a reluctant hero and though *Dead Space 3* features plenty of action, big scares are still a major part of the experience.

Some necromorphs will reanimate corpses that are still cluthing weapons, and when that happens... Well...

The game's more open terrestrial setting doesn't mean the end of those dark, confinded corridors we all know and fear.

capable of delivering a good scare (just imagine a grotesque necromorph suddenly emerging from the snow, only to disappear again once we start shooting...yeah).

We Are Not Alone

So, purists are welcome to go it alone—but what's it actually like to partner up? In some cases, it's very convenient. During that giant ice spider battle we mentioned, we were able share items with co-op cohort John Carver—the gruff space marine who plays opposite Isaac—as well as flank our foe for an easier takedown. And if, say, the friend who joined our game was further ahead in the campaign, that player's inventory would still carry over to our game, potentially making the fight even easier.

Far more significant than combat assistance, however, is the impact our partner has on the story. *Dead Space 3* seems to contain two versions of every cutscene: one for solo players and one for partners. Players don't need to feel locked into co-op, since the game will automatically adjust to the number of characters in the room, but the effect of having another person present for Isaac to pour his heart out to changes the entire emotional tenor of the game.

While the cutscenes we witnessed demonstrated a great deal of tension between Isaac and Carver and hinted at the circumstances that landed them on the icy Tau Volantis in the first place, we don't actually know a great deal about the overall story. Papoutsis, however, promises it provides a few long-awaited answers. "We really want to make sure people understand our fiction and understand what's going on," expalins Papoutsis. "One of the top-level goals we had with *DS3* was to make sure everybody understood where necromorphs came from, what they mean, and what the different factions in the universe are up to."

This may explain the presence of the totally *not* undead Unitologist soldiers we spent most of the demo battling, since the cult-like church has played a murky but major role in all the franchise's conspiracies. We don't know exactly what they're up to, but we do know they're specifically gunning for Isaac (and that shooting human enemies definitely felt a bit at odds with our expectations for the franchise).

Fortunately, new necromorph types are just around the corner, and it's only a matter of time before we grip our trusty plasma cutter once again...even if we have to share it with a partner.

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

Dev Talk

"We felt [the planet setting] would be interesting to build and would look different from anything we'd done before, and how scary and dangerous Tau Volantis could be. So we're really leaning into the weather system as part of the story and mechanics."

Steve Papoutsis
Visceral Studios head

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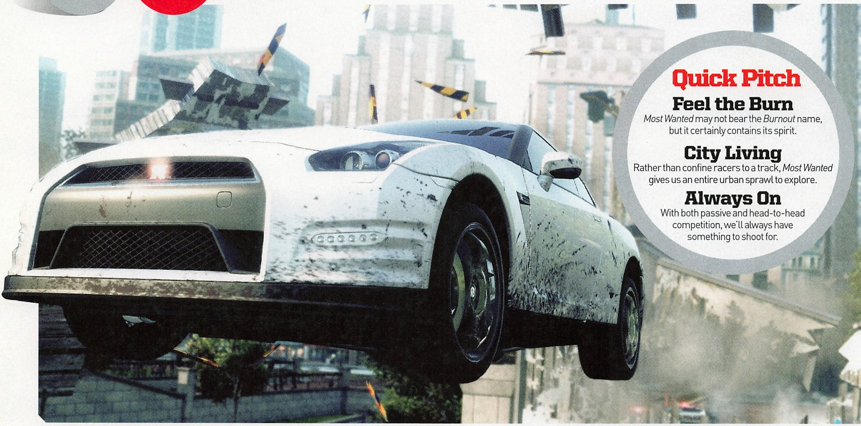


Quick Pitch

Feel the Burn
Most Wanted may not bear the *Burnout* name, but it certainly contains its spirit.

City Living
Rather than confine racers to a track, *Most Wanted* gives us an entire urban sprawl to explore.

Always On
With both passive and head-to-head competition, we'll always have something to shoot for.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **October** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **Criterion Games**

Need for Speed Most Wanted

Four wheels and two tickets to Paradise

What was it that Shakespeare said about names? "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," right? Well, turns out what's true for flowers is true for adrenaline-pumping, reality-defying arcade racing games as well. *Sure, Need for Speed: Most Wanted* is ostensibly a reboot of the 2005 PS2 game of the same name, but in reality, it's basically *Burnout Paradise 2* with a few added police chases. That means dramatic slow-motion crashes, "F—k yeah!"-inducing jumps, and plenty of the world's sexiest cars tearing through an urban open-world setting at irresponsible speeds. See how sweet that smells?

As with past Criterion racers, fun trumps realism in every way. We spent most of our hands-on time drafting, drifting, and destroying opponents to build our boost meter, which bolsters the game's already impressive sense of speed. With intuitive, forgiving handling and plenty of destructible debris strewn throughout the remarkably varied cityscape (which looked beautiful even without the speed blur), *Most Wanted's* inviting gameplay places a premium on thrills and spectacle without forsaking skill.

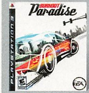
Rubber, Meet Road

Of course, we'd expect no less from the developers of the *Burnout* games. The real novelty here is the game's structure. Like the original *Most Wanted* (and, of course, *Burnout Paradise*), we're dropped into one big, open city and allowed to freely commute from event to event, either following mini-map markers directly to the starting line or weaving wildly through the city's back alleys at random because, hey, why not? And even if we choose not to participate in actual events, Criterion's famous Autolog stat and leaderboard system tracks our every move, allowing for passive multiplayer competition among friends. Accidentally beat your buddy's top speed while casually evading police pursuers? Autolog will record it and let him know.

Naturally, direct head-to-head competition is an option as well. During that same hands-on session, the open game world essentially serves as a lobby where all the drivers can putter around while the game generates new events and corresponding starting spots. Once the event pops up on screen, all the drivers converge on the marked location for anything from straight-up races to longest jump contests, with crashes and cops punctuating every moment of the action. Considering how much fun we had, maybe *Most Wanted* is the appropriate title for this insane crashfest after all. **SCOTT BUTTERWORTH**

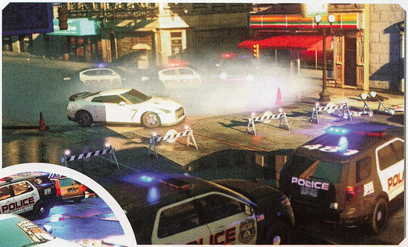
Can't Wait? Play these

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit
(PS3, 2010)
Wish fulfillment for anyone who's ever wanted to be part of a high-speed police chase.



Burnout Paradise
(PS3, 2008)
The game's open-world structure let us go anywhere and do anything, including smash opponents.

This is a pretty sweet-looking ride. Can't wait to smash it.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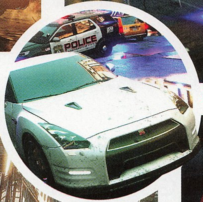
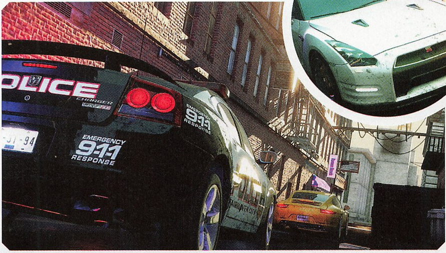
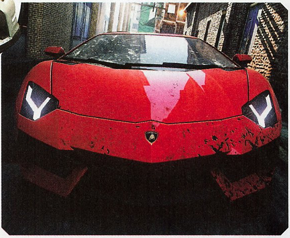
POLICE



A police roadblock? That's no reason to slow down!


OLICE
CHARGER
EMERGENCY 9-1-1 RESPONSE
EMERGENCY 9-1-1 RESPONSE

Race routes are only loosely defined. If you can find a faster way from point A to point B, go for it.



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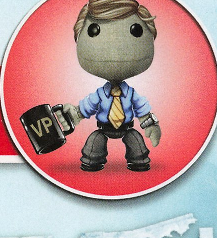

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*PlayStation®Move Motion Controller sold separately. Game requires PlayStation®Move motion controller and PlayStation Eye camera (both sold separately).

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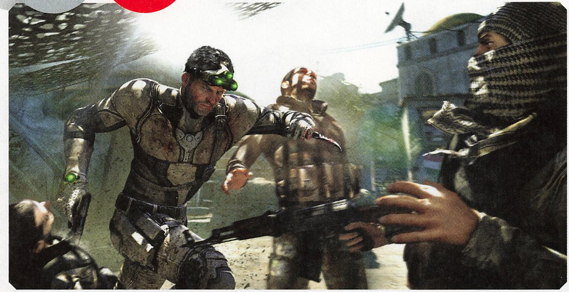


HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Q1 2013** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Ubisoft Toronto**

Splinter Cell Blacklist

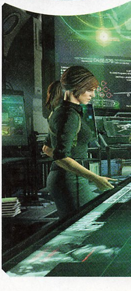
Sam Fisher takes down terrorists like a boss

Aside from Solid Snake, Sam Fisher stands virtually alone on the senior circuit of videogame action heroes. And in *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, age finally brings him an elevated pay grade, as Fisher is promoted to the boss of Fourth Echelon, successor to the covert-ops division he used to work for. There's no more Pentagon office to report to; rather, Sam and a small group of agents fly around in their mobile HQ in ongoing missions based around stopping a new terror plot known as the Blacklist. The promotion means Sam can do things like call in airstrikes to clear enemies from his escape route, and gather intel via a UAV drone. In short, it's good to the boss.

Of course, it's not just Fisher's circumstances that have changed. Ubisoft Toronto, which has taken the reins from Ubi's Montreal studio, has a new gameplay mantra: "Killing in Motion." Sam can now vault from a stealth position and stab unsuspecting enemies in a single motion, or run up a wall after pulling off his trademark Mark & Execute kills. There's every bit as much action as there is lurking.

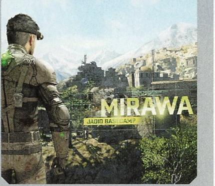
As such, *Blacklist* will feature three tiers of gameplay. Each environment has hardcore stealth routes, other paths that require a lesser degree of stealth, and a final option that'll let us bust through levels action-movie style. Whereas our initial demonstration had Sam charging through the front door of a room that held his target, a second playthrough sees Sam creeping around the outside of the building, using thermal imaging to identify the guards, and planting a charge to stun everyone. In a flash, he climbs in through the back door and takes out the guards, one with his pistol and the other with his fists.

In keeping with one of the themes of this year's E3, Fisher's adding tactical crossbow to his arsenal, along with a taser. Also, series veteran Michael Ironside has been replaced in his role as the voice and body of Sam Fisher by actor Eric Johnson—a change Ubisoft says was made to take advantage of new performance-capture technology—but it seems Sam himself hasn't missed a step. **EVAN SHAMOON**

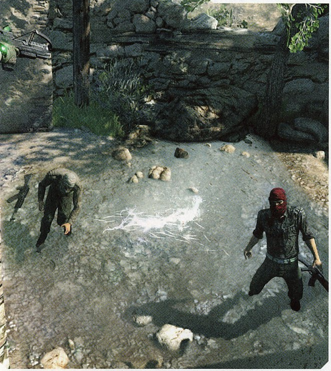


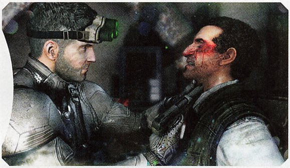
Same Dog, Some Old Tricks

In addition to Mark & Execute, other mechanics and features from *Splinter Cell: Conviction* are returning as well. Last Known Position—whereby when we break the line of sight of an alerted guard, we see a visual silhouette of where the guard thinks Sam is—once again allows us to more effectively flank our enemies. *Conviction's* rather clever presentation, which projected infographics and Sam's thoughts onto walls, will return as well, along with a selection of upgradable weapons.

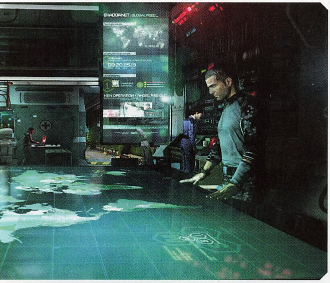


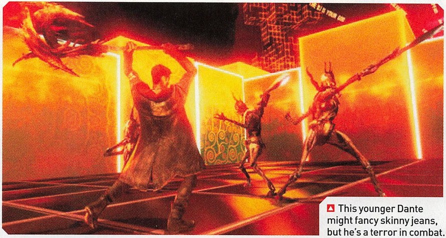
Sam's new crossbow promises to make him even stealthier than ever.



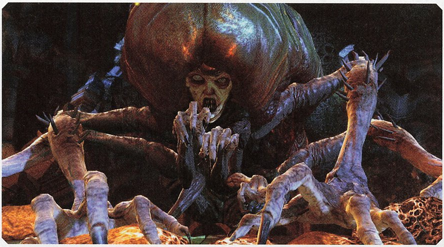


As in *Splinter Cell: Conviction*, Sam can interrogate certain targets, this time with branching possibilities.





This younger Dante might fancy skinny jeans, but he's a terror in combat.



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **January 2013** Pub **Capcom** Dev **Ninja Theory**

DmC Devil May Cry

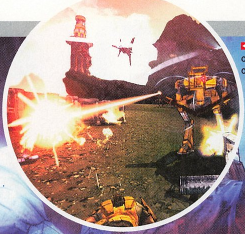
No crying, but a whole lot of cursing

Virility will make you fitter, smarter, sexier, and—perhaps most importantly—it'll kill you. We don't know about the other residents of Limbo City, but we kind of have a problem with that last bit, and apparently so does demon slayer Dante, who's on a mission to put the demons behind the drink to rest.

In a cavernous room within the Virility factory resides the secret ingredient (and our first taste of *DmC's* boss battles): a hideous, acid-spewing slug creature with eight arms and a filthy mouth. After exchanging more than a few f-bombs with Dante, she begins her onslaught of claws, noxious breath, and acidic vomit.

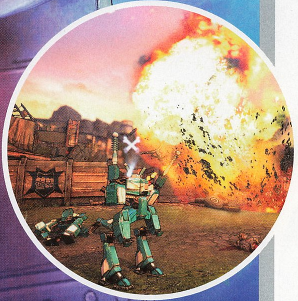
She retches all over the platform on which we were standing, and we have a split-second to grapple from the ground to one of three surrounding platforms before her acid does too much damage. Avoiding attacks becomes a bit easier once we memorize the pattern, but we still die over and over trying to time our combos and stun her. Luckily, the demo gave us an infinite stock of health-restoring gold orbs, which are normally in short supply in other *DMC* games, to continue fighting immediately after death.

As impressed as we are by *DMC's* look, we're even more in love with its feel. Each combo is rapid-fire beauty, and the transition to Dante's Angel and Demon weapons, as well as his guns, feels smooth and simple. Throw in a quick tap of both analog sticks and Dante's "Devil Trigger" is activated, giving him a boost in speed, strength, and health regeneration, as well as some familiar white hair. **ANNE LEWIS**



Big, open environments offer plenty of maneuvering, or fleeing, room.

Handsome Jack's robots are a frequent and familiar threat.



HANDS-ON **Format** PS3 **ETA** September **Pub** 2K Games **Dev** Gearbox Software

Borderlands 2

More than just dub-stepping and death-dealing

Our previous peek at *Borderlands 2* made it abundantly clear that the sequel to gaming's premier shoot-and-loot-fest plans on giving fans lots more of what they love: badass guns and ugly enemies to unload them on. More than fresh firepower and bullet-sponging freaks, though, our latest hands-on session showed off a number of ways the follow-up's honing the series' mission structure, snarky humor, and co-op-focused play.

Behind the auto-turret of the new Commando, Axton, we're let loose in a science-fiction-flavored public square adorned with statues of wealthy a-hole antagonist Handsome Jack. Paired with another player who takes control of sword-wielding Assassin Zer0, we're tasked with tearing down these obnoxious tributes to Pandora's corrupt leader.

Rather than simply filling the statues full of holes until they crumble, however, we must find and reprogram a robot to do our dirty work. Favoring cooperative strategy over free-for-all fragging, the objective sees us escorting the bot to the statues, then protecting it while it gradually reduces each monument to dust with its laser. While Zer0 stealthily thins the ranks of what seem like endless waves of enemies, we stand by the bot to fight off any mech or human menace that sneaks by him.

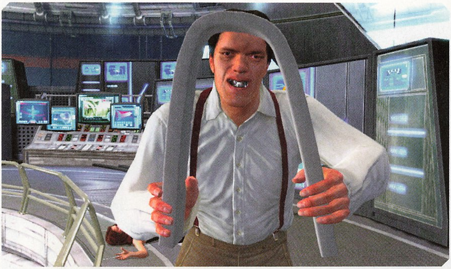
Of course, laying down Axton's auto-turret—which we upgrade to support a second gun—certainly helps keep the hordes at bay. Still, new mech baddies like the BUL Loader, which transforms into a bulldozer before plowing into us, often sees us surviving by the skin of our teeth; or, more accurately, by the game's "Second Wind" mechanic, which improves on *Borderlands* by allowing players to crawl around a bit while attempting to nail that final life-sustaining shot.

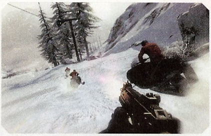
Thanks to Handsome Jack's amusing taunts, the mission manages to tickle our funny bones as much as it taxes our trigger fingers. More than that, its clever objectives and teamwork focus prove *Borderlands 2* isn't simply resting on the success of its predecessor.

MATT CABRAL

Dev Talk

"Opportunity [City] is sort of the personification of [Handsome] Jack, who's our big bad guy and he's kind of come to pave Pandora. He wants to pave the wilderness and turn it into this big, corporate thing, kind of like Dubai. He just has more money than God. He just goes and builds this huge, ridiculous city. There's nobody to live in it yet, he's just got this plan to colonize Pandora and turn it into a respectable place, and I think that was one of the fun challenges in *Borderlands 2*."
Jeramy Cooke
Art Director





OHMSS unfolds largely in the Swiss Alps, so a skiing sequence seems certain.

FIRST LOOK **Format** PS3 **ETA** October **Pub** Activision **Dev** Eurocom

007 Legends

Guns, chicks, and vintage flicks

Ah, come in, 007. It's time to brief you on—good God, button up your tuxedo, man! No one wants to see that. And go easy on that martini—it isn't even shaken! You're not even trying anymore, are you?

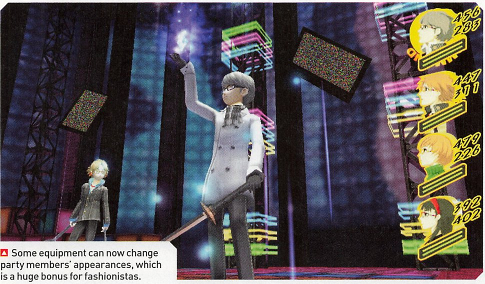
Then again, we can hardly blame you. *GoldenEye 007: Reloaded*, the last outing we sent you on, was more of a sightseeing trip around former triumphs than a genuinely new adventure. A man can lose his edge without that sense of challenge. Hmm, maybe we do have something for you. Are you ready for...the *ultimate* sightseeing trip around former triumphs?

007 Legends is an audacious assignment, taking us from missions based on 1969's *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* and 1979's *Moonraker* to the here and now with the upcoming *Skyfall* (as post-launch DLC), revisiting six Bond movies in total. Using the same design philosophy as *Reloaded*, it presents us with sleek, modern, Daniel Craig re-imaginings of these classics. In *Moonraker's* case, that means redesigned laser rifles (which now behave a little more like submachine guns), smartphone hacking, a pen that shoots explosive- and tranquilizer-tipped darts, and the opportunity to fight side-by-side with computer-controlled scientist/astronaut/CIA agent Holly Goodhead before going toe-to-hideous-metal-face with the towering, nigh-unstoppable Jaws.

Activision will reveal more about the three other movies on a monthly basis, but so far this looks to fall on the side of "legitimately good game" rather than "scruffy Activision tie-in." **JAMES COATES**

Did you know?

On Her Majesty's Secret Service is arguably the most divisive Bond film, thanks mainly to star George Lazenby (above), who's generally remembered as a poor fit for the role. Even now it remains controversial, as critics hold it up as alternately the best or worst Bond movie of all time. Let's hope *Legends* handles it better.



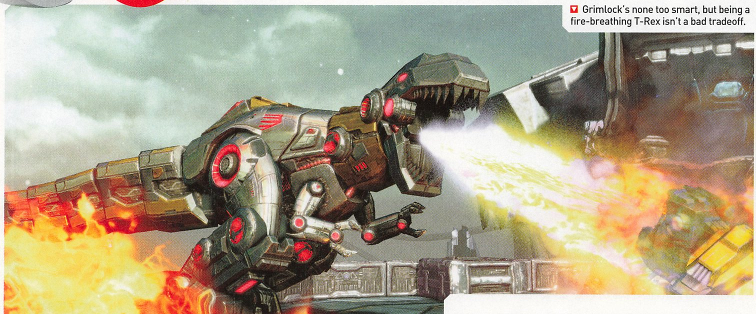
Some equipment can now change party members' appearances, which is a huge bonus for fashionistas.

HANDS-ON **Format** Vita **ETA** October **Pub** Atlus **Dev** Atlus

Persona 4 Golden

Enter the Velvet Room

We've been waiting for a *Persona* game to make it to Vita since the system launched, so this remake has us interested. Although its Vita-specific controls and features are relatively few, *Persona 4 Golden* expands greatly on the PS2 original. *Golden* offers new cutscenes, social links, areas to explore, and touchscreen minigames, like bug-catching. We also now have the option to call on help from others using Wi-Fi when our party's status becomes critical. The changes aren't too dramatic, but the additional content will make *Persona 4 Golden* worth it to fans as well as newcomers. **ANNE LEWIS**



Grimlock's none too smart, but being a fire-breathing T-Rex isn't a bad tradeoff.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **August** Pub **Activision** Dev **High Moon Studios**

Transformers

Fall of Cybertron

Giant robot dinosaur. Need we say more?

With *War for Cybertron*, High Moon Studios proved games could finally do right by the robots in disguise. So how does the developer follow up the two best titles the franchise has ever seen? Well, adding a robotic T-Rex to its roster is a good start.

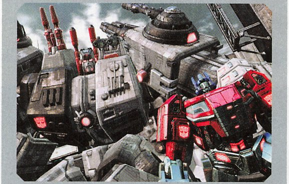
Our latest look at *Transformers: Fall of Cybertron* put us behind the stomping feet, whipping tail, and fiery breath of fan-favorite Dinobot Grimlock. Before turning into the Jurassic giant, though, we kick metallic ass behind his sword and shield. While his unique style favors brutal melee over the ranged attacks of most Autobots, Grimlock can also grab comparatively smaller 'bots and chuck them like empty beer cans.

Of course, the damage his standard arsenal delivers is about as menacing as a mosquito bite compared to what he unleashes in his devastating Dinobot form. Once we're stomping around as the ticked off T-Rex, we're able to execute screen-clearing ground pounds, 'bot-crunching chomps, and a fire-spitting attack that chars all baddies within barbecuing distance.

While it might sound like Grimlock's an unstoppable powerhouse, his over-the-top killing sprees have limits. His transformation is tied to a timed meter, and in his standard form, he can only replenish his health by pulling off up-close kills.

Whether dealing death as a dino or carving a bloody swath with sword-and-shield, it looks like Grimlock's adding a welcome wrinkle to the Autobots-versus-Decepticons war. **MATT CABRAL**

Supersize Me



Grimlock may be twice the size of most of his robot buddies, but he was the puniest toyline-inspired titan shown during our demo. We also got a sneak peek at the city-sized Metroplex, who, to put it in perspective, can hold other Transformers in the palm of his hand. While details on the sky-eclipsing character's role in *Fall of Cybertron* are scant, we know we'll occasionally order him around when playing as Optimus Prime. Apparently, the robo-colossus will target and obliterate enemies and objects tagged by the Autobot leader.

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Quick Pitch

Double Trouble

Warfighter's Fire Team concept encourages pairs to closely cooperate on the online battlefield.

Bromance Benefits

Two-man teams are rewarded for watching each others' backs with XP bonuses and special skills.

Emotions Engaged

Warfighter hopes to forgo mindless run-and-gun multiplayer in favor of emotionally charged online experiences.

▲ *Warfighter* does an excellent job of making ugly ruins look amazing.

HANDS-ON **Format** PS3 **ETA** October **Pub** Electronic Arts **Dev** Danger Close

Medal of Honor Warfighter

The key to victory are our brothers in arms

2010's *Medal of Honor* put players behind enemy lines and into the boots of the U.S. military's elite Tier One soldiers, close-knit squads of elite, terrorist-thwarting operatives. This badass band of brothers is back in *Medal of Honor: Warfighter's* aiming-for-authenticity solo campaign, but for this latest tour of duty, they're also the focus of the new Fire Team feature.

More military-minded strategy than manufactured multiplayer mode, the Fire Team concept encourages two players to pair up within larger online battles. Doing so not only gives gamers a taste of how Tier One troops operate, but also rewards their cooperation. During our hands-on demo, which unfolds in a richly realized Somalian shantytown, we quickly discover the benefits of watching our buddy's back… and having the favor returned.

Playing Sector Control, a conquest-like mode that tasks us with capturing and holding points, we immediately notice our that our partner is clearly identified by a glowing marker; this helpful icon—which can be seen even through solid objects—removes the frustration of having to continually locate our teammate, especially when death's relentlessly raining down in all directions. Taking down enemies together yields XP, granting us both a percentage regardless of whose bullet permanently put our target's lights out. Ideas previously explored in other squad-based shooters, such as sharing health, ammo, and spawning in next to each other, also play a significant role.

The coolest addition, though, is one that serves as both a big XP booster and as a gratifying act of vengeance: when a teammate's fatally wounded, the surviving player can instantly bring them back from the brink of death by taking out the bastard that put him down. For the first time, getting revenge actually *can* bring someone back to life, and if ever a game mechanic could be blamed for a sudden spike in blossoming bromances, this is it.

Of course, that's developer Danger Close's goal: to forge life-and-death bonds between pairs of like-minded players, similar to those that grow between actual soldiers in combat situations. While other games have encouraged teamwork, *Warfighter's* making it the defining hook of its multiplayer experience. In addition to all the aforementioned perks that come with recruiting a comrade, the maps, loadouts, modes, and classes will be fine-tuned to this two-man-team focus.

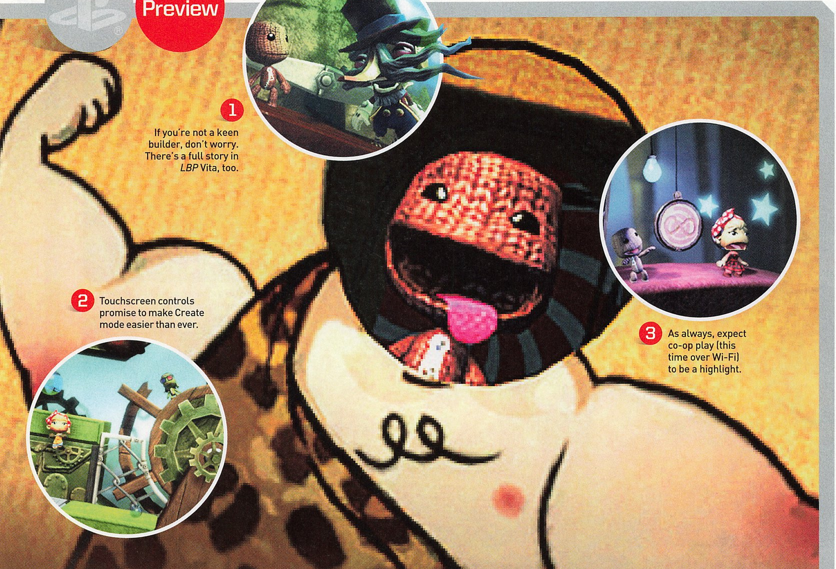
Based on our brief time on the battlefield, we're already loving the idea of building strong, sustainable relationships with another brother or sister in arms. The fact that it's also reflective of how actual Tier Ones operate is just an immersion-pushing bonus. **MATT CABRAL**

Best of the Best

Warfighter's focus on the ultra-elite Tier One operatives is going global. Its 12 multiplayer classes are based on similar squads from around the world, from the Polish GROM and Canadian JTF2 to the Australian SASR and British SAS. The international forces each use their own specific weapons, gear, tactics, and abilities in a way that corresponds to an online shooter's class system. The GROM, for example, display proficiency with everything from rifles to RPGs, making them a solid choice for players seeking a jack-of-all-trades jarhead.

Most troops are required to shave, but Tier Ones are afforded a special exemption.

It just wouldn't seem like a modern battlefield without drones. Fear your robot overlords, enemies!



1 If you're not a keen builder, don't worry. There's a full story in *LBP* Vita, too.

2 Touchscreen controls promise to make Create mode easier than ever.

3 As always, expect co-op play (this time over Wi-Fi) to be a highlight.

FIRST LOOK Format **PS Vita** ETA **TBD 2012** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Tarsier Studios**

LittleBigPlanet

Sackboy breaks another boundary—the one between Vita and TV

This isn't the first time Sackboy's adventures have gone handheld, but while 2009's PSP incarnation was largely great, this forthcoming Vita offering is being pitched as the "definitive version" of the game. Big words, especially as development duties have been shifted to Tarsier Studios, whose previous contribution to *LBP* was creating DLC costumes. However, Media Molocule stresses it's still overseeing things, while Tarsier has been busy recruiting prominent *LBP* community members to work on level design.

The adventure has a carnival atmosphere, as Sackboy teams up with an eccentric ringmaster to tackle a new foe—the Puppeteer. Full advantage will be taken of Vita's inputs, encouraging Us to tilt, touch, pinch, push, pull, drag and flick our hero through levels. In addition to four-player online competitive and co-op modes, the touchscreen can now be used by two players in competitive matches or turn-based games.

In the Create suite, all existing tools from *LBP2* will be available, as well as extra Vita functionality such as drawing objects directly onto the touchscreen and using the built-in cameras to capture stickers and textures. However, perhaps the biggest addition is the Memorizer function, which—for the first time—allows saving *in* user-created levels. That side of it promises to be huge: creators will now have the tools to make huge standalone adventures featuring characters that develop over time, and with the high quality of content the *LBP* community has become known for, it essentially means an endless stream of free gaming experiences.

In addition, a cross-play patch is heading to *LBP2* on PS3 that will allow players to control Sackboy using their Vita. We'll be able to activate new power-ups using the touchscreen, and portals will transport Sackboy between areas on the television and Vita screens to give things an extradimensional feel. Expect new story DLC taking advantage of these cross-play features sometime later in the year. **JAMES COATES**

Can't Wait? Play this

GREATEST HITS
PSP
LittleBIG Planet

LittleBigPlanet
(PSP, 2009)
It's not as pretty, but the littlest *LBP* was a huge achievement.

UPDATE Format **PS3** ETA **Q1 2013** Pub **Namco Bandai / Paramount Digital Ent.** Dev **Digital Extremes**

Star Trek The Game

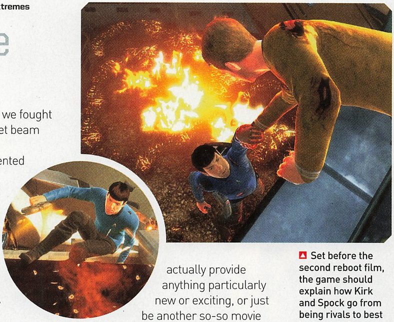
Old trouble on New Vulcan

In our latest look at *Star Trek: The Game*, the Enterprise's crew is sent to New Vulcan after responses to its distress calls are met with silence. As Kirk and Spock head down to the planet to investigate the situation, they find Vulcan corpses littering the ground, only to then be attacked by the survivors. After fending off crazed, poisoned Vulcans (phasers on stun!), we meet our new enemy, the Gorn—lizardlike aliens pissed at the Vulcans for colonizing their planet.

First encountered in the original-series episode "Arena," in which Captain Kirk faced off against a Gorn captain, these aliens don't look strike us as the type to settle things through one-on-one combat. Waves of Gorn surrounded our position as we fought to survive long enough to get beam back aboard *Enterprise*.

Kirk and Spock are presented as an asymmetrical co-op team in the game; where Kirk is a more shoot-first, ask-questions-later type of character, Spock is more tactical (and also a frequent target of questions from Kirk). In our demo, he pulled out his handy tricorder to scan the environment for clues and enemies for weaknesses, which could then be exploited by Kirk.

It's still too early to tell if the cover-based third-person shooter will actually provide anything particularly new or exciting, or just be another so-so movie tie-in but the system of relying on a buddy and getting a different experience as each character could deliver some interesting new combat opportunities. **ANNE LEWIS**



Set before the second reboot film, the game should explain how Kirk and Spock go from being rivals to best buds, right?

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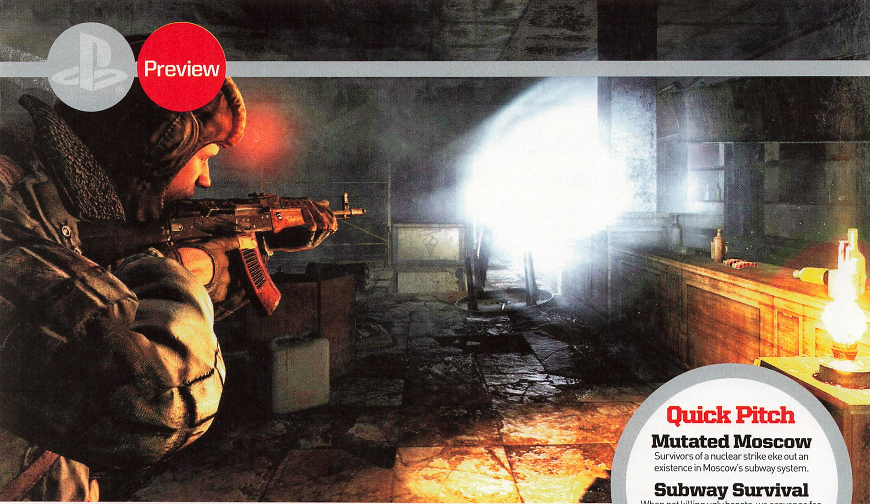


Quick Pitch

Mutated Moscow
Survivors of a nuclear strike eke out an existence in Moscow's subway system.

Subway Survival
When not killing ugly beasts, we scavenge for ammo and supplies on the uninhabitable surface.

Scary Story
Expect a memorably horrific, narrative-driven campaign.

FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **TBD 2013** Pub **THQ** Dev **4A Games**

Metro Last Light

Mind the gap...and the mutants

Not Metro 2034

Released for Xbox 360 and PC in 2010, *Metro 2033* was based on a 2003 book of the same name penned by popular Russian author Dmitry A. Glukhovsky. Glukhovsky followed up his successful novel with a second book, titled *Metro 2034*, but *Metro: Last Light* doesn't use the author's sequel as narrative inspiration. Though developer 4A decided to go in a different direction for *Last Light's* story, they've still brought Glukhovsky on as a consultant.

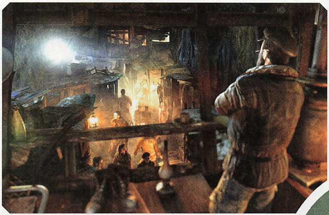
Given the surprise critical and cult success of low-budget survival horror shooter *Metro 2033*, it's little shock that THQ's going multi-platform with its sequel. Following the events of the original—which had us struggling to survive in Moscow's mutant-infested subway system following a nuclear strike that turned Russia into an uninhabitable wasteland—*Metro: Last Light* builds upon its predecessor's premise, while serving as a self-contained experience for PS3 gamers unfamiliar with the first game.

As with *2033, Last Light* is as much about surviving as it is spraying grotesque monsters with hot lead. In addition to scavenging for ammo and supplies, we must monitor and replace gasmask filters, and occasionally pump generator-powered flashlights to shed slivers of light on the grisly freaks trying to eat our faces off. Other such elements include using lighters to burn away spider webs, collecting cobbled-together weapons (such as the "Bastard Gun"), and using ammunition as currency—a neat idea from 2033 that *Last Light* is expanding upon.

When not staring death in the face, we're treated to a gorgeously bleak post-apocalyptic world. Our demo showcased dynamic rainstorms, gore galore, and disturbing sights such as the remnants of crashed commercial airliners littering the nuclear dystopia's landscape. More than just atmosphere-amping touches though, these detail-oozing artifacts can also affect the gameplay. While searching one of the doomed planes, for example, an oversized arachnid crawls off a corpse and attacks returning protagonist Artyom's gasmask; squashing the spidery menace leaves vision-obstructing goo on his visor that must be wiped away. Of course, the bug guts are nothing but a bothersome smear compared to the pulpy mess we'll have to clean off Artyom's mask after later battles with bigger baddies.

While much of our hands-off demo saw Artyom alternately scrounging for goods and splattering entrails all over dark, claustrophobic confines, it also hinted at the game's narrative direction. One particularly affecting scene came when Artyom discovered a cockpit still occupied by the corpses of its pilots; this triggered a horrific flashback of the two airmen flying into Russia just as it was being vaporized by the nuclear attack. Developer 4A Games is a big believer in delivering lengthy, story-driven campaigns that serve as more than mere appetizers to a multiplayer main course, so we're guessing that this scene will be one of many regularly appearing in our nightmares.

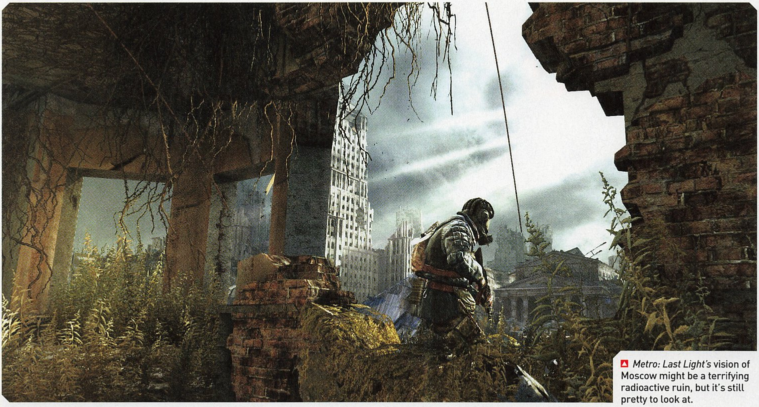
In a market cluttered with me-too military shooters, *Last Light's* survival-horror take on the genre is shaping up to be a flesh...er, fresh alternative for FPS fans. **MATT CABRAL**



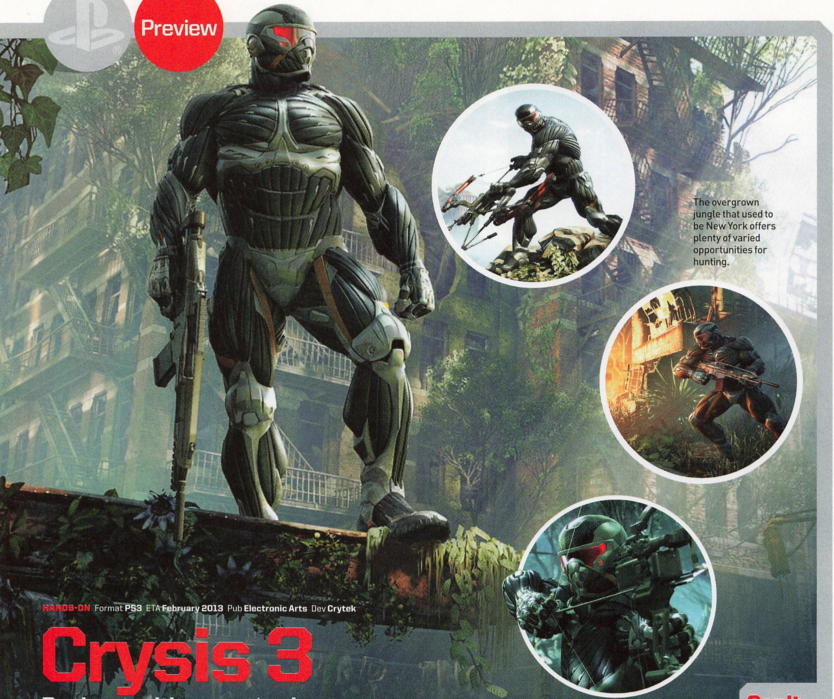
Being stuck underground for decades sounds bad, but it sure beats mutation. *And* there's no commute.

Everyone wears a gasmask. It's just a bad idea not to. Curse those smokers and their second-hand smoke.

As if terrifying mutants weren't enough, future-hell Moscow is also home to Nazis. Yes, *Nazis*—they never die, only multiply.



Metro: Last Light's vision of Moscow might be a terrifying radioactive ruin, but it's still pretty to look at.



The overgrown jungle that used to be New York offers plenty of varied opportunities for hunting.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **February 2013** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **Crytek**

Crysis 3

Be the stealthy, sporting hunter...or not

The *Crysis* series has been partially defined by the high-tech hand-cannons it puts in players' hands, so fans were understandably bewildered by the reveal of *Crysis 3's* compound bow. But there's no need to worry about protagonist Prophet trading his Nanosuit for Robin Hood tights just yet, as our time with the stringed death-dealer proved it a worthy addition to the alien-shredding arsenal.

Before unleashing our first arrow, the bow impressed by unfurling itself with a few satisfying clicks. Following this slick introduction, we learned it can be fired without disabling the Nanosuit's cloaking ability. Embracing our inner Predator, we skulked about the stunning urban rainforest setting with camo activated, arrow nocked.

Soon enough, we'd surgically thinned the ranks of patrolling CELL soldiers; some pinned to walls, others silenced with clean shots through the throat, all while their allies scrambled to discover which direction death rained from. Stealthily evening the odds is optional, though, as varied ammo types allowed us to garner substantially more bang from the bow. We cooked baddies extra crispy by firing electricity-laced arrows into puddles, then literally lit things up with a volley of thermite-tipped projectiles.

This totally blew our cover and robbed the bow of its predatory edge, but we were able to swap it out for the 500-rps–firing Typhoon; if the bow doesn't convince that *Crysis 3's* not abandoning its roots, this bullet-riddling bad boy certainly does. (It also came in handy during the demo's central mission: storming a dam's tight corridors to blow it to bits.) We look forward to killing silently—and violently—when the visually striking shooter hits next year. **MATT CABRAL**

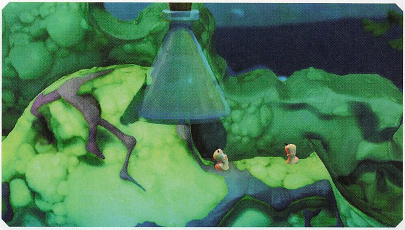
Can't Wait? Play this

Crysis
(PSN, 2011)
Crysis doesn't have the bow, but it delivers big, open spaces and a super-powered suit. Two out of three ain't bad, right?

HANDS-ON Format **PSN** ETA **Q3 2012** Pub/Dev **Team 17 Software**

Worms Revolution

The early bird gets blown right up



Completely rebuilt on a new engine, *Worms Revolution* brings back the nostalgic 2D battlegrounds of the past with detailed new 3D graphics—and, for the first time, class-based warfare.

Each class has the expected advantages and disadvantages; the Heavy takes a ton of damage but moves slowly, whereas the Scout is quick and digs tunnels no other type of worm can use but is weaker than the other classes. The Soldier class is the most well-rounded one, and the Scientist can heal the team *and* build items like Sentry Guns (think Engineer crossed with Medic from *Team Fortress 2*).

For our demo, all the weapons were unlocked, and we were able to blast our enemies out of existence with favorite toys like the Holy Hand Grenade and the Concrete Donkey. New dynamic effects can also be used to crush our adversaries; drown them in pools of water or poison them with toxic gas pouring out of a destructible item in the environment.

Worms Revolution features both local co-op and a single-player campaign, which will present us with objectives that we'll need to complete as quickly as possible with a pre-set loadout.

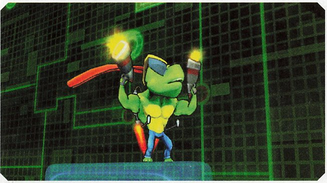
With Mark Barry of *The IT Crowd* narrating the game in a nature-documentary-style, *Worms Revolution* is certainly at its quirkiest. And few things compare to the unbridled joy that comes from using a sheep to rain destruction on our enemies. **ANNE LEWIS**

Worms have been blowing themselves up for years, but the little invertebrates keep on fighting the good fight.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3, PS Vita** ETA **TBD 2012** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Sanzaru Games**

Sly Cooper Thieves in Time

Learning firsthand about Sly's family tree

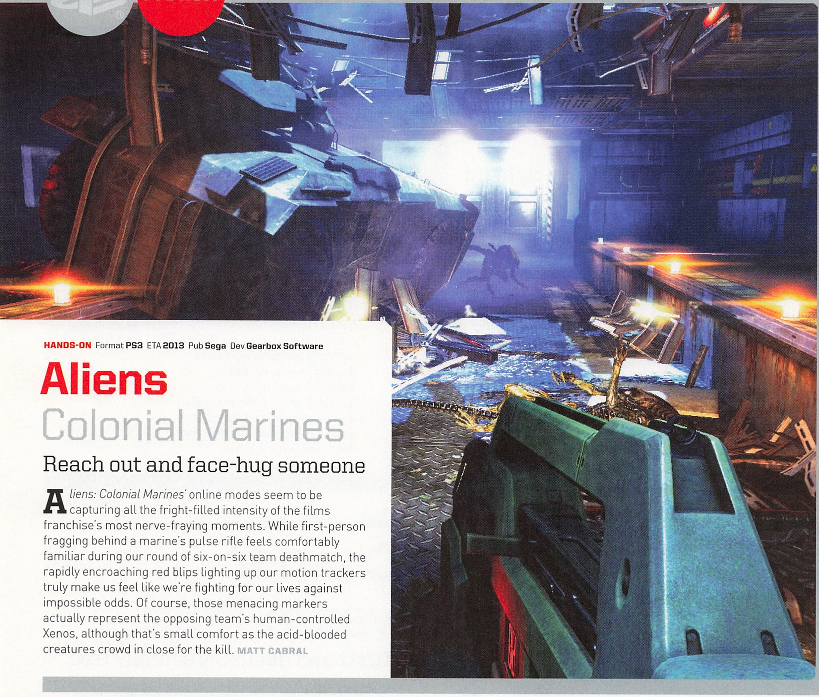


Alter Ego, a side-scrolling minigame, lets turtle-genius Bentley hack computer systems by flying and shooting.

The *Sly Cooper* series has a history of growing its roster with every subsequent game, and *Thieves in Time* may feature the biggest yet, as Sly's thieving ancestors join the regular cast at different points in history.

The latest additions are Sir Galleth Cooper and Inspector Carmelita Fox, who share the limelight in the "Mechanical Menace" demo. As Galleth, we have a chance to explore an open, medieval hub village before heading off to climb a mechanical tower and face the dragon that lives on top of it. Getting up there involves a move called the Catapult Crash, which lets Galleth latch onto moving plates and launch himself skyward through destructible barriers. After timing our way past numerous moving traps, we reach the top to find the "dragon"—a three-headed robotic giant—dormant. Galleth cleverly unplugs it, at which point the beast rumbles to life and swallows him.

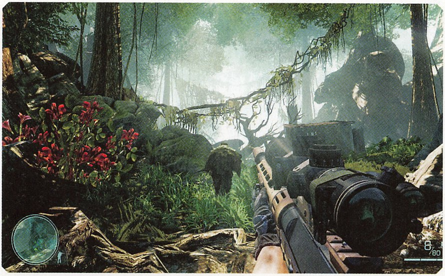
Enter Carmelita, whose FPS-like controls let us zoom in to aim as we dash around, dodging the beast's attacks. Eventually, one of the heads exposes its weak spot by breathing fire, giving Carmelita a chance to stun it, hop on, and shoot one of its eyes out. Shattering all six eyes takes a while, but eventually Carmelita saves Galleth, and (with a new actress voicing her, as in every game) soothes his wounded pride by promising to keep the rescue "their little secret." **MIKEL REPARAZ**



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **2013** Pub **Sega** Dev **Gearbox Software**

Aliens
Colonial Marines
Reach out and face-hug someone

Aliens: Colonial Marines' online modes seem to be capturing all the fright-filled intensity of the films franchise's most nerve-fraying moments. While first-person fragging behind a marine's pulse rifle feels comfortably familiar during our round of six-on-six team deathmatch, the rapidly encroaching red blips lighting up our motion trackers truly make us feel like we're fighting for our lives against impossible odds. Of course, those menacing markers actually represent the opposing team's human-controlled Xenos, although that's small comfort as the acid-blooded creatures crowd in close for the kill. **MATT CABRAL**

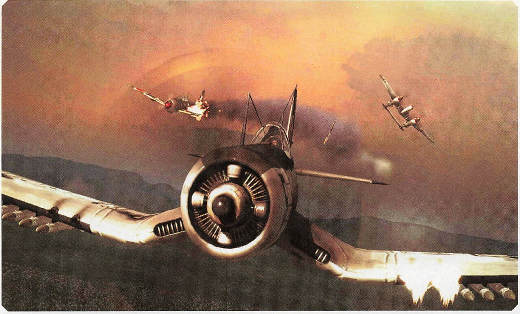


HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **August** Pub/Dev **City Interactive**

Sniper
Ghost Warrior 2
Staying out of sight in Sarajevo

Basing a shooter on an actual war is always bound to ruffle a few feathers, but we can think of a few real-life enemies that fit in pretty neatly with a black-and-white morality. Nazis, for example, or Serbian death squads. Strangely, few games have given us a chance to shoot at the latter, but *Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2* bucks that trend with a campaign set in Sarajevo, circa 1993.

The first *Sniper* wasn't a hit with critics, but it still sold like



Participate in historic battles like Pearl Harbor and, perhaps, alter the outcome.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **August** Pub **Mad Catz** Dev **Trickstar Games**

Damage Inc. Pacific Squadron WWII

Fun and accessible air combat for all

Known primarily as a peripherals manufacturer, Mad Catz is entering the games-publishing fray with *Damage Inc.: Pacific Squadron WWII*. While the game has all the hallmarks of a historic combat flight sim, the focus is on a decidedly arcade-like experience—think of it as a WWII take on *Ace Combat* without those wussy lock-on missiles.

The campaign offering is robust with 23 missions, each comprised of numerous primary, secondary, and even secret objectives. The missions we sampled had us attacking battleships and aircraft carriers, performing aerial reconnaissance and destroying ground targets, as well as engaging enemy aircraft in dogfights. A bullet-time–esque Reflex mode slowed down the action to help us more accurately put fire on targets, while War Speed's time acceleration minimized the lulls in action when flying between mission waypoints. Success in combat allowed us to unlock aircraft upgrades from the game's stable of 30-plus planes.

Online multiplayer supports up-to-4v4 drop-in/drop-out with a nice variety of modes that include Survivor's head-to-head dogfights and Scratch One Flattop's team-oriented aircraft-carrier hunt. *Damage Inc.'s* single-player missions can be played cooperatively as well, but unfortunately there is no local play available for the game's other multiplayer modes.

While *Damage Inc.* isn't likely to redefine the flight sim genre, its aim seems to be to remind us how fun blowing things up and shooting planes down can be. That's a mission it can accomplish. **ROGER BURCHILL**

Ace Bundle

For those interested in logging some flight time with *Damage Inc.*, the Collector's Edition will offer the PS3 game, a Pacific AV8R Flight Stick peripheral, WWII-era stickers, and a special DLC plane in a $99.99 bundle. The game and stick will also be available for purchase separately for $49.99 and $59.99 respectively.

crazy—and those sales, we're told, have funded development of a greatly improved sequel. Playing a bit like *Call of Duty* (specifically, *CoD4's* All Ghillied Up mission), our demo with *Ghost Warrior 2* put us on the trail of Serbian war criminal Commander Vladic, with orders to observe and gather evidence—but to leave him alive. Fortunately, the same restriction didn't apply to his men, and as we followed our A.I. spotter through a trainyard crawling with armed militia, we got a comprehensive tutorial on how to pop faraway heads and creep under parked trains without alerting anyone.

Sadly, it couldn't last. Toward the demo's end, we faced off against a depot's worth of enemies from a tower, and—after accidentally grazing a target—we alerted everyone, forcing us to ignore stealth in favor of gunning them down. Still, there's some real promise here; we'll see how it shakes out soon enough.

MIKEL REPARAZ

Where the hell is...

Anarchy Reigns (Sega)

First it was fall 2011, then it was July 2012, and now it's early 2013. Are we *ever* going to see the chaotic beat-'em-up *Anarchy Reigns* in the U.S.?

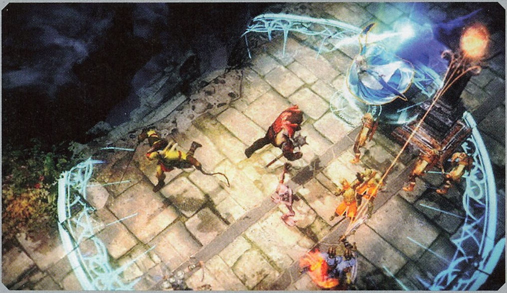
The latest on...

New shots, new games, new info

Guardians of Middle-earth

Format **PSN** ETA **Fall** Pub **Warner Bros. Interactive Ent.** Dev **Monolith Productions**

The Lord of the Rings steps into the realm of multiplayer online battle arenas with *Guardians of Middle-earth*. We can choose some of Tolkien's most famous characters and face off in furious five-on-five battles. Want to watch Gimli take on Sauron? Yeah, so do we. Each character has special abilities, summons (to call in a Balrog or an Ent), and customizable loadouts to help keep the fighting balanced. MOBAs are a rare sight on consoles, so hopefully *Middle-earth* can help PS3 fans understand and appreciate what has traditionally been a PC-centric genre.



Dead or Alive 5

Format **PS3** ETA **September** Pub **Tecmo Koei** Dev **Team Ninja**

Team Ninja's over-the-top fighting game has confirmed a few more characters for its roster, including Kokoro, Tina Armstrong, Bass, and (surprise!) *Virtua Fighter's* Sarah Bryant, who joins previously revealed *Virtua*-mate Akira.

SCORE
HIGHSCORE
JUMP!

Joe Danger: The Movie

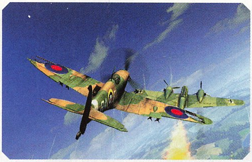
Format **PS3** ETA **TBD** Pub **Hello Games** Dev **Hello Games**

A quick hands-on with our favorite stuntman revealed hectic, combative four-player action and plans for user-created levels, but the *real* draw is a crazy new array of vehicles that include balance-challenging unicycles, mine carts, and jetpacks.

Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 2

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD** Pub **Konami** Dev **Mercury Steam**

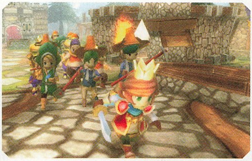
Castlevania fans have secretly wanted to play as Dracula for decades, and they're about to get their chance. Having failed to redeem himself, Gabriel Belmont returns as Dracula, now on a quest to gain power and smack down his pesky enemies.



Dogfight 1942

Format **PS3** ETA **TBA 2012** Pub/Dev **City Interactive**

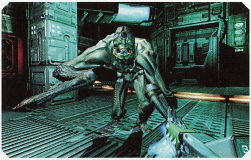
Those who fear the difficulty of some flight sims should consider this arcadey WWII aerial combat game. The controls are highly accessible, and the targeting reticule—which shows where our bullets will actually land—helps steady even the shakiest of hands.



New Little King's Story

Format **PS Vita** ETA **Fall** Pub **Konami** Dev **Konami**

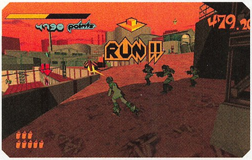
A touchscreen-enabled sequel to an overlooked Wii classic, this *Pikmin*-esque adventure puts us in control of a young monarch out to regain his kingdom by directing soldiers, peasants, and other lackeys to uncover items and slay monsters.



Doom 3: BFG Edition

Format **PS3** ETA **October** Pub **Bethesda** Dev **id Software**

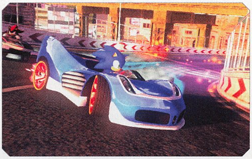
Though *BFG Edition* contains all three *Doom* games, the centerpiece is undoubtedly the HD-updated horror-shooter *Doom 3* and its expansion, *Resurrection of Evil*. Expect better lighting and checkpoint systems, as well as revamped online multiplayer components.



Jet Set Radio

Format **PS Vita** ETA **Summer** Pub **Sega** Dev **Sega**

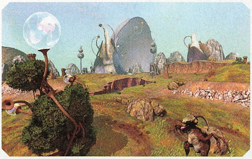
We already knew Sega's classic skate/graffiti title was headed to PSN, but we've now confirmed it will also hit Vita, complete with the original soundtrack, additional graffiti art, and a few unspecified, Vita-specific touches.



Sonic & All-Stars Racing: Transformed

Format **PS3** ETA **Holiday** Pub **Sega** Dev **Sumo Digital**

NASCAR driver Danica Patrick is set to appear as a playable character in Sonic's latest kart/boat/plane racer, alongside *Shinobi's* Joe Musashi and *Super Monkey Ball's* AiAi. File this one under "What the hell?!"



Zeno Clash II

Format **PSN** ETA **2013** Pub **Atlus** Dev **Ace Team**

This surreal first-person brawler features strong RPG elements, plenty of bizarre creatures to beat up, and drop-in/drop-out co-op for friends who want to experience the awe and wonder of this strange world together.

Gut Reaction

What's strong and what's wrong

▲ Collected Gems

A *Journey Collector's Edition* containing *flOw*, *Flower*, and *Journey* will be released on August 28.

▲ Show Stealers

Sony and Naughty Dog dominate the E3 Game Critics Awards, with seven pub and five dev awards.

▲ A-Lara-ble

True Blood actress Camilla Luddington plays Lara Croft in the new *Tomb Raider*.

▼ Vita Drought

We sure love our Vitas, but the sparse release lineup for the next few months is disheartening. C'mon holidays!

▼ Dom and Out

Saints Row DLC *Enter the Dominatrix* has been cancelled, and will now be incorporated in a full-priced sequel next year.

▼ Far Away

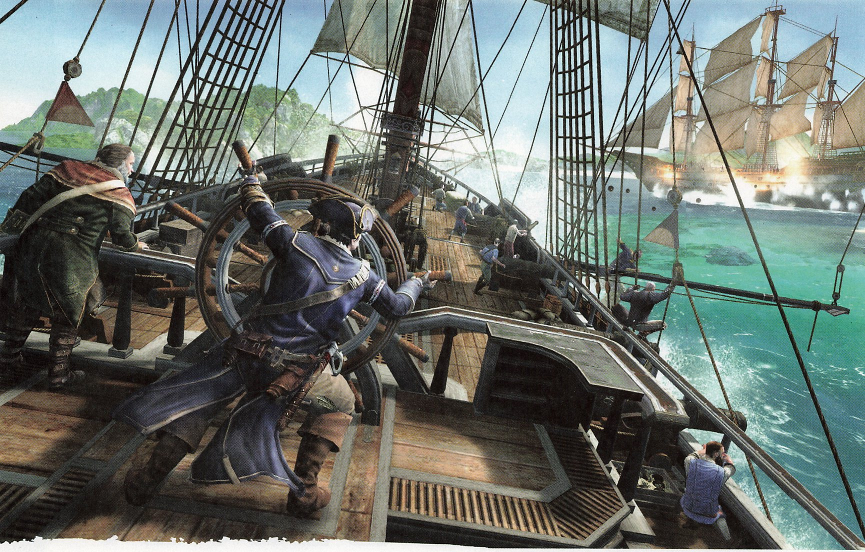
Far Cry 3's release has been pushed back to December 4.

VICTOIRE AUX ASSASSINS!

(Victory to the Assassins!)

The war between Assassins and Templars still rages. As *Assassin's Creed III's* Connor fights in the shadows of the Revolutionary War on PS3, French-African freedom fighter Aveline will slice her way through 18th century New Orleans in PS Vita's *Assassin's Creed III: Liberation*. Are you ready to battle on two fronts?

By Mikel Reparaz



It's the spring of 1778, nearly two years after the Declaration of Independence drove a permanent rift between Great Britain and her American colonies. It's also 25 years into *Assassin's Creed III's* 30-year storyline, and Connor looks decidedly un-Assassin-like as he stands at the bow of a ship, peering out across the Caribbean ocean at distant cliffs. He's traded his white hood for a snappy tricorn hat, for starters, and apart from a couple of beaded armbands, his blue jacket displays none of the Mohawk accessories we've seen him adorned in up until now. More surprisingly, the other sailors address him as "Captain." For one of the Assassins, who traditionally operate on the fringes of society, this has to be a first.

The High Seas

Alex Hutchinson, *ACIII's* creative director, is tight-lipped about exactly how and why a half-Mohawk, half-English Assassin rises to an apparent position of authority in the fledgling Continental Navy, and how it fits in with fighting a behind-the-scenes war against the shadowy Templars. He does, however, acknowledge that naval exploration is "not a big Native American pastime."

"We tried to address this in the narrative," says Hutchinson. "So when you get to it in the narrative, there should be some unease about the whole idea of being on a giant woodpile floating on the sea."

By this point, any uneasiness on Connor's part is clearly gone. After a quick, confident stride across the deck of his ship, the *Aquila*, Connor takes the wheel, unfurls the sails and cuts through the clear tropical waters in search of Templars. Threading a narrow path between two cliffs, he immediately runs afoul of a trio of English ships and—after ducking to avoid a volley of cannon fire from the biggest one, a Man O' War—uses *Aquila's* swivel guns (which are smaller than its broadside cannons, and can be aimed freely) to rapidly target and

Passing the Torch

Connor (or as he's called by the Mohawk: Ratonhnhaké:ton) represents a pretty significant change for longtime *Assassin's Creed* fans who've grown to identify with the dashing, smirky Ezio Auditore over the last few years.

"I think Ezio is one of the best characters in gaming," he adds. "The voice is distinctive, the outfit's distinctive, everything about him is strong. Being quick-witted and attractive to ladies and empowered... how can you argue with these things? This is exactly who I want to be. I want to be Errol Flynn for my entire life, and then phase into George Clooney.

"Sometimes, the guy you just met doesn't seem as resonant as the guy you've hung out with," says Hutchinson.

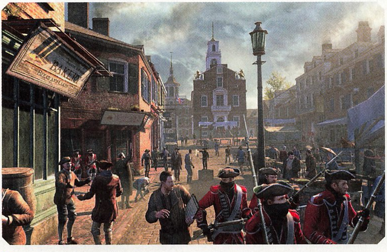
Connor, meanwhile, is more earnest, more direct, and rougher around the edges—and as Hutchinson tells it, those differences are a big part of his appeal.

"For a while, it was almost like [Connor] was hitting the skip button on the cutscenes," says Hutchinson. "Other people will go on about things, and he's just like, 'No, shut up. Why are we here?' I like the fact that he is very direct and very driven. He's primarily a good person. He's very much on the side of the good guys, and not the side of any particular part of the conflict, so there are a lot of moments in the game where he's doing different things for different reasons, but generally it's to try to do the right thing."

annihilate the smallest vessel. Seconds later, *Aquila* pulls parallel to a slightly larger ship, and after briefly aiming its cannons (which project lines across the water that show where the cannonballs will fly), Connor orders a volley that sends the other boat crumpling beneath the waves.

As Connor chases the Man O' War out into open water, the ocean and sky begin to darken. *ACIII's* version of the Caribbean features dynamic weather that can change rapidly, and as the waves begin to swell and crest, *Aquila* starts to pitch violently through the water. The waves, we learn, behave like terrain, meaning they can rise to block *Aquila's* cannon shots. This forces Connor to time his volleys accordingly, which soon becomes doubly important when we discover the ship he was chasing has led him into an ambush.

As another English warship looms into view on *Aquila's* starboard side, Connor pulls



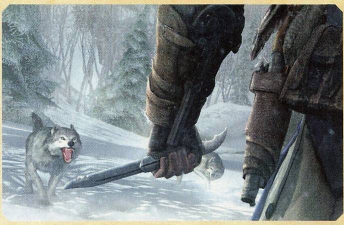
According to Ubisoft, *ACIII's* AnvilNext engine is capable of rendering thousands of characters at once, making cities and battles seem more realistic.

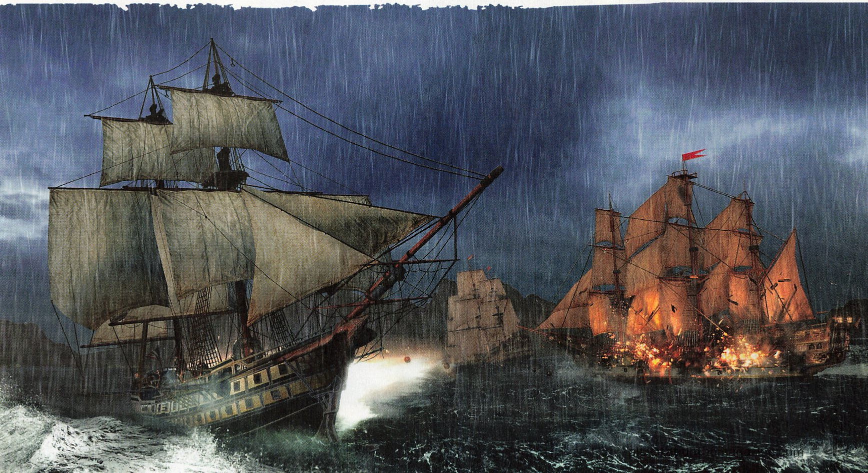
Not So Hidden

A fan-favorite weapon, the Hidden Blade is back again in *ACIII*, but once again it's gone through a few changes. It can now pivot once extended, enabling Connor to actually hold it like a knife. Why the switch?

"You think about blocking with something that's on your wrist, and...it just looks a bit lame," says Hutchinson. "The same with striking. It doesn't work. We knew [combat] was going to be dual-wielding, so the animators were like, 'If I could pop it out and hold it, I can do all these cool new things with it.'

"We wanted the tone of the character and the tone of the weapon to be fresh," says Hutchinson. "The blade still slides out if you want to use a traditional Hidden Blade, but at that point you can also flip it and grab it on both sides."





> "For a while, it was almost like [Connor] was hitting the skip button on the cutscenes. He's just like, 'No, shut up. Why are we here?' " *–Alex Hutchinson, Creative Director*

sharply about and, shouting against the storm, orders his crew to loose a new kind of cannonball—fire shot—at the newcomer. Not only does this look spectacular, as flaming cannonballs soar through the darkness, but it exposes a weak spot (shown as a white circle on the enemy's hull) that Connor can target with the swivel guns, causing a huge explosion and turning the ship into a fiery death trap.

With only his original quarry left sailing, Connor levels a volley of chain shot at the Man O' War, tearing its sails to ribbons and immobilizing it. As *Aquila* draws close, its crew takes up arms and hurl grappling hooks across the gap to bring the vessels together. Just as Connor leads his men in a leaping charge onto their rival's deck, the demo slows, fades to white and abruptly ends.

Worlds Apart

While he won't share details on how naval warfare fits into *ACIII's* plot, Hutchinson's a little more open about how it fits into the game's world. "It's not an exotic sequence where you're on rails," he says. "You have full control of the navigation of the boat, full control of your weaponry. It's a significant portion of the game, and parts of it are on the main path, and then it has its own thread alongside as well.

"There are lots of fun things to explore. It's a big chunk of *AC III*," says Hutchinson.

At the same time, it won't be *completely* open, and in describing it, Hutchinson lets us in on exactly how *ACIII's* world is structured. "We toyed with the idea early on of doing a full open world; you get on your boat in Boston Harbor, and you sail it to New York," says Hutchinson. "It's not *that* open."

Instead, *ACIII* is built around what Hutchinson calls "content islands," with open but separate areas interconnected through fast travel, much like in the first two *Assassin's Creed* games. "There's Boston, and you get to the end of it and you have to fast travel to New York, or to the other locations."

Why not opt for one seamless world, like in *Brotherhood* or *Revelations*? "We could have possibly done it; it just would have felt like Toy Town," says Hutchinson. "If you can run from Boston to New York in two-and-a-half minutes, it feels odd. We wanted it to feel like big, discreet locations."

It also might have been a little too taxing for the hardware. According to Steven Masters, *ACIII's* lead game designer, the game's wilderness area alone is 150 percent the size of *Brotherhood's* sprawling version of Rome. Meanwhile, *ACIII's* versions of New York and Boston are each around 75 percent the size of Rome, and that's not counting the Caribbean or other as-yet-unrevealed locations. Couple that with a new engine that Ubisoft says can put thousands of characters onscreen at a time, and the game's scope suddenly seems monstrous.

"What we're looking at here is the biggest and best *AC* game yet," says Masters. "What you're seeing in these demos is just a small taste of the game. From the forest navigation stuff you're seeing, with the incredible free running in organic terrains, this is the biggest map we've ever created."

Lose the Claw

ACIII isn't just about adding more space, of course; as a numbered entry in the series, it's expected to make bold strides beyond what quasi-sequels *Brotherhood* and *Revelations* achieved. And to that end, Masters says, "We've spent the last two-and-a-half years just rebuilding all our core gameplay from the ground up—the navigation, combat, and stealth systems. Everything has gotten a massive overhaul for this game."

"It's basically an all-new IP in the existing universe," says

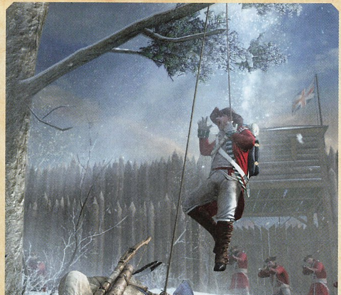
Get Over Here!

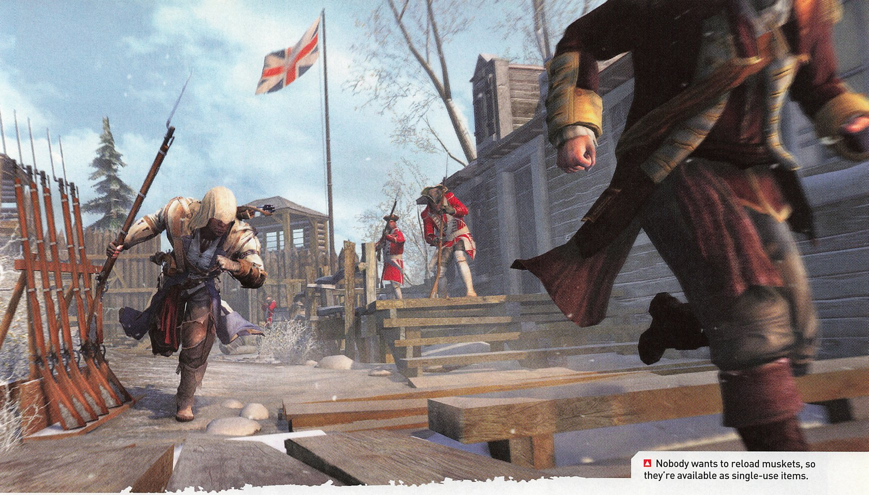
So far, we've seen Connor use a new weapon—the rope dart—in the wilderness demo to spear a Redcoat and hang him from a tree. However, there's much more to it than that. A versatile tool as well as a weapon, Connor can use the rope dart not just to hang enemies (which will also distract others nearby), but also to quickly strike distant foes and yank them toward him.

"I can grab a sniper and pull him off the roof, or if I'm in the middle of a combat scenario, I'll just whip it out in the middle to take out a guy who might have a defense to some of my other moves," says Masters.

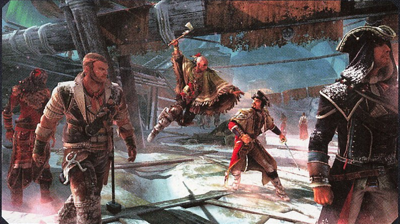
So does Connor ever shout the three-word phrase in the title above?

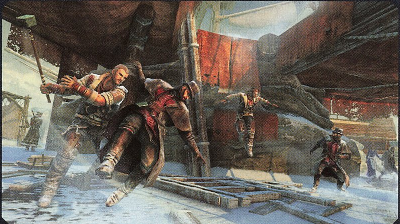
"We were careful [to avoid] that," Masters laughs. "The other thing people ask is, can you use it to swing? We did prototypes, but it crosses a line into where it starts to feel more like a fantasy game. It starts to feel less believable when you start doing those things; additionally, it also devalues your core navigation."





Nobody wants to reload muskets, so they're available as single-use items.





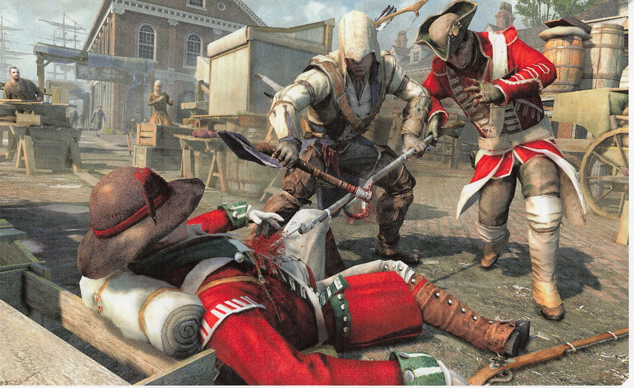
Game of Death

As it did for the last two *Creed* games, Ubisoft Annecy is once again creating *ACIII's* multiplayer, which continues the blade-in-a-crowd dynamic of quietly hunting other players in public settings. Our brief hands-on session didn't reveal many obvious changes to the basic gameplay—once again, we try to keep a low profile, blending in with identical civilians as we attempt to detect and murder other players without being hunted down ourselves—but there are a few additions worth noting.

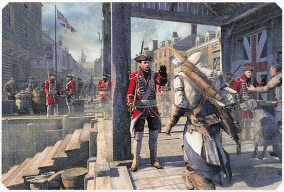
For starters, multiplayer reflects the campaign's move toward big wilderness settings, as we saw in the Northwest Passage map—a huge, glacial camp dominated by a ship that was trapped in the ice. It also shares single-player's dynamic weather, with random snowstorms that made it hard to see other players amidst the sea of white (but cleared us to move quickly while nobody could see).

Gameplay-wise, we had a chance to try out a new mode: Domination, in which the goal is to stealthily capture areas of the map without our enemies noticing. The twist is that entering areas held by our team will make us essentially unkillable (but will still let our prey stun us), while enemy territory makes us vulnerable to instant death. On that note, there's been a small but significant change to the hunter/hunted dynamic: the assassination and stun attacks are now mapped to the same button, and the onscreen prompt to stun our hunters when they get too close is gone, stripping away the split-second clue *Revelations* gave us as to who they were.

There'll also be a slew of new abilities to unlock while we level up (along with an extra ability slot dedicated to ranged attacks). Some of the new abilities include poison darts, Disruption (which messes up our opponents' screens), Glimmer (invisibility) and the Animus Shield, which can protect us from the effects of all other abilities. Factor in a new storyline that unfolds from the perspective of the sinister, Templar-held Abstergo corporation, and we're pretty keen to get our kill on.



The new combat lets Connor disarm and kill foes without even having to wield their weapons himself.



Hutchinson. "We tried very hard to rebuild all the mechanics. We kept the pillars and core concepts. It's the same universe, it has the same tone, and it's within that same group of ideas, but it's *not* the same stuff with a new skin."

One of the biggest changes, and the one that longtime fans are most likely to notice instantly, is the elimination of what Hutchinson calls the "Assassin's Claw"—that slightly awkward position, with thumb and forefinger extended and curled, that our hands assume as we continually hold down R1 and X to free-run everywhere. Instead, we'll just hold down R1 to make Connor run, something that's as much about opening up new options as it is about streamlining one of the series' clunkier aspects.

Building a more organic world opens up a lot of new options for getting around that simply weren't available in earlier games. This comes in especially useful when climbing trees, which offer multiple paths for running and climbing. "When there's a junction in the path, you can go forward or you can go up," says Masters. "If you hold the X button, you'll go up. Holding X will also do a couple other cool things for you, but it's also taking away one of the major frustrations: when you're climbing up a landmark and you accidentally eject off the side and kill yourself. I have stats. That's basically no longer a problem, unless you *want* to do it."

Getting rid of the Claw, Masters points out, will also let us do something we've never been able to do before in a *Creed* game, at least not easily: move the camera while running.

"There will be an element of re-learning," he says. "When you pick up the pad, you'll notice the difference. But there were some legacy decisions that we had been struggling with for a while, and with this new entry, we thought it was a good time to make some corrections."

Fighter's Instinct

Some of the biggest such corrections seem to have been to the combat. The way Connor enters into fights is now more streamlined and automated; if someone nearby wants to fight him, Connor will immediately drop into a ready stance, and can leave by simply running away. Running away, for once, is something we'll have a reason to do, as we learned during a demo set in Boston. Here, Connor effortlessly carved his way through a squad of British troops in an open marketplace—and as soon as they went down, another troop rushed in, fresh muskets at the ready. Wounded and without Ezio's familiar stock of medicine (Connor's health simply regenerates automatically while he's out of combat), it was time for Connor to turn tail and run, jumping through an apartment window (which works like multiplayer's chase-breakers, cutting off our foes' line of sight) as he went.

While fleeing is now a meaningful action, the combat itself has

Reviving History

Assassin's Creed III's lead scriptwriter, Corey May, has been with the series since the first game. And while he couldn't tell us much about *ACIII's* story—that'd venture too far into spoiler territory—he was pretty forthcoming about the process of writing it.

At the beginning, says May, "I thought [the Revolutionary War] was going to be trim and boring. That evaporated about five minutes into the process, but that was originally my fear. Not so much that it was going to *be* boring, but that people would *perceive* it as boring."

Boring or not, research into the era has taken up much of May's time. "We spent a lot of time determining who was around, what they were doing, why they were doing it, what history says they were doing there, what possible gray areas there are to explore. We look for possible gaps in historical record when people may have disappeared, or where all of the sudden there's very little information on where they were for these 10 years."

"It's almost like putting pieces up on a board, and then deciding what's the most interesting and what fits with the story," says May. "There's the story we want to tell—Connor's story—and then there's the story of the world, which is one part our work of fiction, and another huge part of what was actually happening historically, and trying to bring those two things together."

> "[The new controls] take away one of the major frustrations: when you're climbing up a landmark, and you accidentally eject off the side and kill yourself. I have stats."
>
> *–Steven Masters, Lead Game Designer*

also been altered to be faster, more fluid, and better suited to dealing quickly with groups of enemies. Without the need to hold R1 to go into a defensive stance, even the series' familiar system of parries and counterattacks has changed. "Now it's about hitting a face button at the right time to enter into the counter mode, and then hitting another face button to finish the counter," says Masters. "So you sort of choose your ending on the counters."

With a weapon in each hand, Connor's able to cut a vicious swath through his enemies with apparent ease—but for some, indiscriminate killing has never been *Assassin's Creed's* appeal. "One of my goals was to provide more non-lethal options," says Masters, as we watch Connor flatten against a wall, grab an approaching Redcoat from around a corner, yank him into cover, and choke him out. Like Ezio, Connor will be able to fight with his bare hands, disarm enemies, and leave rank-and-file baddies alive and unconscious, but he'll have more ways to do it. The stealth takedown we've just witnessed is one of these options.

More interestingly, poison—the one *AC* weapon that always made us feel a little bad—has been replaced (or at least supplemented) by a narcotic knockout drug, letting us finally enjoy the fevered antics of the poisoned without the guilt of knowing they're in horrible agony.

Sub Rosa

Dealing with enemies in *Assassin's Creed* has never been purely about combat, of course; stealth has always played a role, and in *ACIII*, it's one of many things being retooled. Aside from the stealth attacks, the rules for blending into crowds have been relaxed a bit; now, so long as he's standing near two people, Connor will be practically invisible to the guards. Foliage has also joined his roster of hiding places, and where Ezio could always jump into large hedges, Connor's able to take advantage of more widespread vegetation, crouching low to creep through bushes and past unsuspecting guards.

Even the Brotherhood can help Connor stay undetected; instead of just providing quick assassinations and arrow storms, one of their new functions involves arriving in disguise—as Redcoats, of course—and pretending to hold Connor captive. This lets them sneak effortlessly past security checkpoints, provided they don't linger long enough to fill the guards' suspicion meters.

We've seen quite a bit of *ACIII's* gameplay, and there's no doubt that what we've seen is impressive. However, when it comes to one of our favorite aspects of the series—its story—the demos, and the developers themselves, have done their best to remain mysteriously, almost frustratingly opaque.

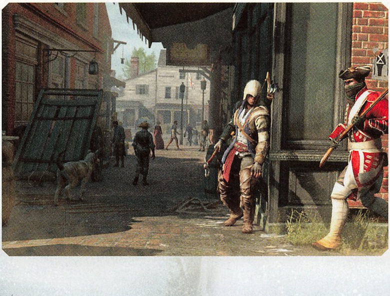
What's going on with Desmond? "I can say he's back, and that's it," says Corey May, the game's lead scriptwriter.

Why is Connor captain of a ship? "I don't want to answer that question," says Hutchinson. "It's like saying Darth Vader is Luke's father.

"What I will say, though, is that everything you've seen in the game, and everything we've shown, is from a very themed segment of the game, which is the Revolutionary War period," says Hutchinson. "The Revolution is the middle to second half of the game."

Pressing Hutchinson further reveals only that there are some other big surprises in store, about which he seems almost giddy. We've got a few theories as to what those might be, but just like everyone else, it looks like we're in for a wait before we learn if any of them are true.

Of course, if *Assassin's Creed* has taught us anything about what's true, it's that nothing is.



Il Mentore

Whether they're drawn in by the elegant killing, the climbing or the historical settings, the *Assassin's Creed* community is one of the more vibrant and active ones in gaming, with artists, writers, and cosplayers creating new derivative works on a constant basis. And they all answer to one man: Ubisoft community manager Gabe Graziani.

The holy grail for *AC* cosplayers seems to be working Hidden Blades—and Graziani's seen more than a few. "When I was at Comic-Con, all the people cosplaying as Ezio and Altaïr had Hidden Blades," he says. "I'd see them and be all like, 'How did you get that in here? Oh, it's built into the design of the weapon that it can be concealed. Of course!'"

One prolific crafter is Lee "Fevereon" Camara, who's also built a replica of Connor's tomahawk (left), Aveline's machete, and other games artifacts (see them at www.fevereon.com).

Graziani's highest praise, however, is reserved for two separate fan-made projects: the short film *Assassin's Creed: Parallel* ("I don't know how they did it. It's phenomenal") and the *Assassin's Creed* Wiki, a sprawling online database so comprehensive that "the narrative directors for the brand use [it] to keep track of the universe."

"Honestly, [the community] makes my job so easy, because they're so creative and they're so positive on the whole," says Graziani. "I think that's really unique for the Internet in general."

FOR WHOM THE BELLE TOLLS

While Connor fights the good (if murderous) fight in the Northeast, Aveline de Grandpré has her own battles to face down south. Set during the failed Louisiana Rebellion of 1768, which erupted after France ceded Louisiana to Spain as part of the terms of a treaty, PS Vita's *Assassin's Creed III: Liberation* gives us an entirely new city to explore: New Orleans.

"New Orleans was founded by a different nation with a different vision," says producer Martin Capel, "And from its very earliest days, it developed its own identity."

The Big Easy

New Orleans has its own distinct architecture, with an eye toward ornamentation. "From colorful houses with decorated balconies and trelliswork, through to ornate iron street lamps and the placement of trees, the city presented us with many new features that allowed us to explore new methods of city traversal," says Capel.

Built using *ACIII's* AnvilNext engine, it's a free-roaming adventure like its console cousin, complete with a playground-like wilderness to explore (the bayou, home to deadly alligators), a multiplayer mode (which hasn't been shown yet), and ancillary areas (like Mexico's Chichen Itza) for us to visit. All of Connor's new abilities, like free-flowing combat and tree-climbing, will be at our disposal. At the same time, *Liberation's* design sensibility is geared toward handheld play.

"When we designed the missions, we wanted them to be shorter, so people could play them on the move," says Mathieu Hector, *Liberation's* third-party producer. "We have a rule: You must be able to do a mission between two train stations on the subway."

That doesn't mean the game *itself* will be short; Hector says *Liberation's* central storyline should take between 12 and 15 hours to complete. But the missions themselves are relatively brief, as we see firsthand when Aveline gets roped into rescuing a crowd of French rioters. They've been arrested by Spanish troops, an as-yet-unnamed friend tells her, and have been imprisoned

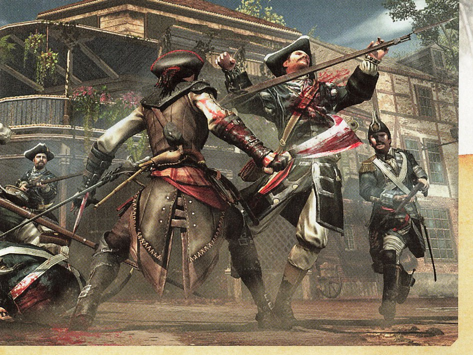
Small-screen Assassin

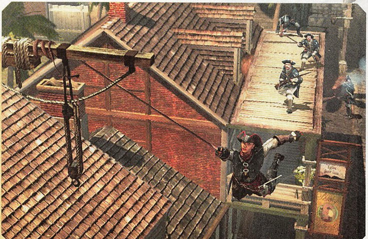
Aveline cuts a unique figure, even among Assassins. The daughter of a wealthy French merchant who married his African slave, she dresses like a man (complete with a tricorn hat, which replaces the traditional hood and helps her better blend in), although she can disguise herself in different outfits. She comes from a background of relative privilege, speaks with a thick accent, and seems fairly cocky—sort of like a certain other Assassin we could name.

"We actually feel that we didn't invent Aveline," says Capel. "She was always there just waiting for us to find her!"

"Aveline sees and experiences a city full of contrasts—life and death, poverty and wealth, freedom and slavery," says Capel. "She is able to feel each of these in herself and the world around her, and she forms strong opinions about them, which play an important part of her motivations." And, apparently, in her decision to join the Assassins, an organization to which she's introduced by an escaped slave named Agate.

According to Capel, the decision to go with a female protagonist went hand in hand with New Orleans itself. "Our research uncovered the fact that it did occasionally present some unique opportunities, and a small number of women with similar backgrounds to Aveline acquired considerable wealth, power, and respect. These women became our role models for Aveline—a strong, empowered young woman who has the opportunity, confidence, and willpower to ruthlessly achieve her goals."





in a wine repository to await execution.

Death, Creole Style

Aveline's rescue plan involves stealing a cart packed with gunpowder and ramming it into the building, and there are more than a few Spanish troops between it and her. While her signature weapon is a sugarcane machete (with a short, heavy blade that makes it ideal for hacking), she also has standard-issue Hidden Blades, which she uses to air-assassinate a couple of hapless Spaniards on patrol.

Before their friends have time to react, we get to see a new feature: the Chain Kill. Powered by a gauge that fills up with every kill, it freezes time, letting Us tap on the touchscreen to select a string of targets. Once the targets are marked, Aveline whirls into action, taking everyone down with a rapid string of automated death strikes.

"You can't use it every time, because it would be too easy," says Hector, "But if you want to avoid a fight and kill everybody—if you have too many enemies, for instance—boom, she kills everyone."

Aveline also packs a couple of unique weapons (selectable through a touchscreen-driven inventory), including a whip that can be used to swing through the city, and a blowpipe that allows her to kill silently from a distance, even while hiding in a haystack.

Freedom Rider

When Aveline finally finds her way to the gunpowder cart, it's time for a quick chase scene en route to the wine repository. Sadly, Aveline can't ride horses freely through the city, but she *can* occasionally use them for on-rails sequences like the one we experienced, which makes use of the touchscreen; tapping it makes the cart accelerate, while holding a finger on it slows us down.

"We wanted to be consistent [with *ACIII*] in terms of controls," says Hector. "Every time we used the touchscreen or another Vita-specific feature, it was to add value and make the game more adapted to the small screen."

As Aveline nears the repository, she leaps to one of the horses, while her unidentified friend clumsily hits the ground rolling. The cart speeds out of control and, slamming full-force into the building, tears open a hole for Aveline to rush into, overpowering the Spanish and freeing the rioters as she goes. After a brief quip about Spanish wine making better floor polish, Aveline is free to stalk the streets once again.

Our time with her has been short, but it's clear that there's much more to learn about Aveline—partly because *Liberation's* conceit is that it's a product created as propaganda by the Templar-controlled Abstergo corporation. Why would Abstergo make a game with an Assassin as its hero? Capel won't tell us, except to say that Abstergo wants us "to experience a gray area of the Assassin/Templar conflict as an Assassin, rather than a Templar."

Twin Blades

Liberation doesn't just hit stores on the same day as *Assassin's Creed III*; it also connects directly with it, in more ways than one.

"Both games feature a different Assassin in different locations, following a different path to reach the same climactic moment in history," says Capel. "*Liberation* in particular looks at New Orleans' role in the Revolution—this is a view of the events not normally covered in games and other media."

While the city wasn't one of the 13 colonies fighting for independence, Capel tells us, its ties to France and Spain made it a vital conduit between the colonists and their European allies. "As the Revolution continued and Spain declared war on Great Britain, so New Orleans found itself drawn into a conflict that affected both the New World and the Old."

So what does this have to do with *ACIII*? "As Aveline follows the trail of the Templar plot in New Orleans, she finds herself embroiled in the war to the north, and fighting alongside Connor to eliminate a common enemy," says Capel.

Reaching that point (and connecting Vita to PS3) will also unlock a few extras for owners of both games, including larger ammunition pouches, skins for use in both single-player and multiplayer and—in Aveline's case, at least—the use of Connor's tomahawk, which she can use as her primary weapon when she hunts.

Competitive Edge

If there's one area where PlayStation has an edge over its competition, it's in the breadth and quality of its first-party software lineup. The man charged with overseeing Sony's crown jewels? SCE Worldwide Studios president **Shuhei Yoshida**. We recently sat down with Mr. Yoshida to discuss the challenges of the past year, the current state of PS3 and Vita, and what to expect as the next console generation shift looms. **Interview By Roger Burchill**

When PTOM last spoke with you a year ago, Sony was just emerging and recovering from the PSN hacking attacks. How do you think that ultimately affected the business and what lessons were learned from that?
Securing our service is absolutely the number one priority of the company. We are very happy that since the incident, our system has been fortified by many rigorous measures. We have more people watching its activities, and there's a stricter, more stringent process for updates and the software that we use for the updates. So far, so good. In retrospect, in the haste to grow our business and functionalities, something really important wasn't given enough attention. We, as a company, have learned that we should never do that again.

There seems to be a shift in focus toward downloadable games; how does that affect you on the development side? Is it as simple as having a new set of rules you just live with now?
There are many different ways to look at things. Some people might find it taxing that there's no end to the job now when you create a game and ship the product. You could move on in the past, but people expect a game to be updated—new content, new features.

From another standpoint, it's a great way to improve a game and extend its life. We do rigorous playtesting before a game launches, and it's a very crucial process of making our games fun to play, but it's not like we can hire hundreds of people to test our games. But because we are connected now, though, we are able to understand what and how our consumers are playing our games. Sometimes we see things, like one level is too difficult when a lot of people stop playing our game at a certain point. In that case, we could tweak the balance. That choke point could be removed and give a much smoother, nicer experience for our consumers.

I think it's a great way to know our consumers and what they like and what they want and improve our offering.

That can also bring up other issues: Sometimes there's a perception that if a game gets released with a day-one patch, it wasn't really finished. It's almost like that beta testing is still continuing on day one. Then there's the issue of day-one DLC. Is that content something that should have been part of the package from the beginning?
It's a perspective. Given the choice, people want everything for free. But it's the publisher's and the developer's job to create the content for the price that people can see the value of. If we have more content, then we might want to make some of the things optional for people who really want more content and would be willing to pay for the DLC. We always try to find the right balance and provide value for the price we ask.

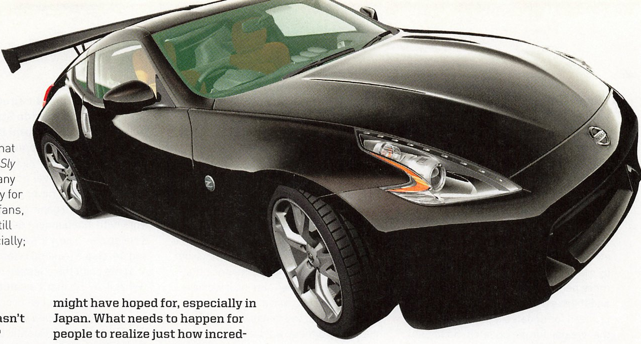
In regards to the day-one patch, we try very hard *not* to do it, but there is always something like bugs we can't fix by the time the game is distributed. We like to provide great experiences for consumers, so given the choice between not fixing smaller issues or fixing it day one, we tend to choose to fix things day one. Something we really try to avoid is to create a big downloadable update on day one so people have to wait for a long time to play.

Worldwide Studios is comprised of extremely creative, innovative, and technically proficient development studios—companies that Sony deemed worthy enough that they wanted to own them outright. Can you give some insight into what goes into that process of determining who you want and how they come into the Sony fold?
We have grown our studios very organically. We really believe people are the most important thing in terms of making games—people's creativity, teamwork, and culture. It doesn't work to just assemble the most talented people. There has to be a very good chemistry between people and a trusting relationship between them. We don't encourage all studios to grow into a 100- or 500- or 1,000-person studio. We really talk to people who are the heads of the studios to see what their vision is, and what kind of games and how many people they want and work with them as they produce titles.

Two of the three big titles Sony had at this year's E3 press conference were from Worldwide Studios. The other is from Quantic Dream, which isn't part of Worldwide Studios, but they seem like a natural fit. Why haven't they been acquired?
When you look at our history of acquisitions, we never acquire developers we've never worked with. It's part of our organic process that we work with independent developers to develop some new IPs and experiences and develop a trusting relationship. At some point the question is asked, "What if...?" So that's a natural organic process. I wouldn't be surprised if conversations happen with such a creative talent like Quantic Dream. I'm not saying anything special here, but that's our kind of pattern. We worked with Sucker Punch and Naughty Dog and Guerrilla Games and after a few titles, those conversations happen.

On the other end of the equation, Zipper Interactive was closed down earlier this year. What was the decision-making process there? And is *SOCOM* basically done as a franchise, or might it go to another developer?
That was a very difficult decision and thing to deal with. The second question: Is *SOCOM* done? It's not done. We never definitely retire any

Sony franchises are never definitely retired. The forthcoming *Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time* should offer some hope for *SOCOM* fans.



franchise. It's sometimes great to have a fresh look at the classics that we have. We are launching a new *Sly Cooper* game this year after so many years. Never say never. I feel sorry for people who are longtime *SOCOM* fans, and there are many people who still play *SOCOM 1* and *SOCOM 2* especially; those seem to be their favorites.

Moving on to another eagerly awaited Worldwide Studios' product: *The Last Guardian* wasn't at E3 again. What's its status?
There are some technical issues that are being worked on right now. The team in Japan is still working very hard and it's still not time yet for us to give an update.

Other studios in your roster have been quiet for a while. Can you speak to anything Guerrilla Games and Polyphony Digital might be up to these days?
Gran Turismo 5 has been very well updated and there's additional content. They just released new GT Academy content on PSN so people can compete to become a real-life racer. Polyphony is also working on maintaining, adding features, and improving *GT5*. Others there are hard at work on something we haven't announced yet. Same with Guerrilla Games. They've been busy, and hopefully we can talk about it in the near future.

Switching to Vita—there seems to be a lot of integration planned between PS3 and Vita. But the launch wasn't as robust as Sony might have hoped for, especially in Japan. What needs to happen for people to realize just how incredible a machine it really is?
We are very happy with the hardware and platform we created. Worldwide Studios was part of the hardware development. We worked with the hardware guys for the past three years, exchanging ideas and trying things out. We are very happy with the platform the Vita is. It's an amazing gaming experience. Some of the examples we show that we are proud of are *Uncharted: Golden Abyss* and *LittleBigPlanet*, which we are releasing later this year. These are fantastic games that take advantage of the platform. The people want more games, obviously, and not just first-party, but third-party. Some of the third-party games are great, quality games. The *Assassin's Creed* game looks fantastic.

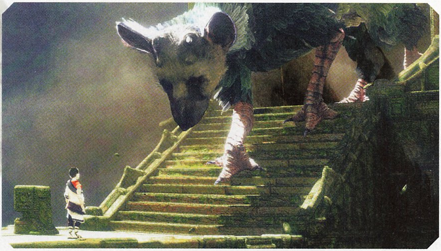
But because of the growth of the social/mobile sector, lots of opportunities are being presented to publishers to choose from, and because the social/mobile side is the growing sector in terms of the business now, they are very quickly shifting their development resources to be part of that growing market. We are having a more difficult time than we had anticipated in terms of getting support from third-party publishers, but that's our job. We will continue to talk to development communities and publishing partners and tell them why Vita can provide a great experience for the IPs they have and I hope the *Assassin's Creed* game will prove that.

We will also cater to smaller, independent developers by providing Vita support as well as PS Mobile support. It's very easy to develop content on PS Vita. More content and more games is the number one priority that we have to realize Vita's potential.

Whether *Gravity Rush* has the retail clout to become a top-tier franchise remains to be seen, but it's just the type of fresh, unique game experience Vita needs.

One of the criticisms of the launch was that there weren't enough original IPs. But *Gravity Rush* really stands out. This seems to be an incredible new IP that really shows off the uniqueness of the Vita experience.
We are ecstatic about *Gravity Rush*, and I'm the self-assigned PR person for it on my Twitter account [@yosp]. I just keep tweeting about *Gravity Rush*. We're so happy about the reaction we're getting from people—that's one game we are really proud of in terms of new content and a new IP on PS Vita

Another one is a game we announced recently called *Soul Sacrifice*. The game was conceived as a PS Vita title, and Keiji Inafune, formerly of Capcom, is working on the game.
His new company's name is Comcept. He's working very hands-on on the game, and it's very exciting.



The Last Guardian has had its share of development problems, but Sony seems adamant that it will release. It remains one of our most highly anticipated titles.

> "Our engineers are talking with their engineers so that in the future, Sony's products will play more nicely with PlayStation products."

I saw *DUST 514* at the Sony booth today and I was really impressed with the Vita integration that's going on there, especially since the Vita gives such great access to that all-consuming game world.
That's another thing. We announced many different ways to use PS Vita and PS3, and one functionality—we are calling Cross-Controller—is to make the Vita the PS3's controller. We are releasing new DLC for *LittleBigPlanet 2* later this year so consumers can create games using the Vita as a controller for the PS3. People can create single-player levels using the Vita's touch functionality or use gyro sensors in the PS3 game or make a multiplayer game where one or two players use PS Vita and the other players use DualShock controllers. These are very exciting possibilities.

It's hard to evaluate PS Move's success because it may not be a hardcore gamer's main focus for how to control or interact with a game, but a casual player might be much more receptive. *Sorcery* has the best Move implementation to date, but what's the thinking on Move moving forward?
I think our focus is shifting more to the casual side. It's a natural thing for PS3 to mature and go broader, but we are still continuing to see a great application of Move to core gamers' games. FPSs are a very natural fit. It's very natural to use PS Move to point and shoot. Another great example is the Move version of *Portal 2*. Fantastic technical work has been done on *Portal 2*, and it's an ideal game to use Move because it's first-person and requires very sensitive manipulation of objects. We'll continue to see the adaptation to core gamers' games though, as well as new casual experiences like Wonderbook.

Sorcery proved that Move can enhance gameplay with the proper implementation. Will developing new tech make the Move experience a desired necessity instead of a novel option?

Do you think you'll see more integration between Sony's different hardware divisions? It seems natural that a PS Eye could be built into a Bravia TV and then all the sudden you don't have that extra connection. And there's also the technology being developed for 3D without the glasses... All of a sudden, motion control can provide a more interactive experience, but there are fewer cumbersome hardware pieces to work together.
That's a great point, and up until last springtime our interaction with Sony's TV group was limited to a 3D TV project. That was a big initiative from the consumer electronics industry side and we created 3D stereoscopic games on PS3 to work with them. But since last spring, Kaz Hirai has been promoted to be responsible for Sony's TV business as well as PlayStation. Since then, we've started talking more frequently and more directly with the people who are making TVs. Something like camera integration, like you said, or better connectivity... We are talking about many different ideas. Our engineers are talking with their engineers and product-planning people so that in the future, Sony's products—not just TVs, but other Sony products like cameras or smartphones—will play more nicely with PlayStation products.

From Sony Electronics' standpoint, it's almost like they finally discovered PlayStation. Sony people said that we were kind of difficult to approach. We thought they were difficult to approach, and we were kind of independent of each other. Now that we are under the same roof under Kaz Hirai, we get lots of inquiries from Sony's research group. They have some very early technology they are working on and they would like to get feedback from our game people. So I'm helping set up meetings and introducing people, just as I did to develop PS Vita.

I know it's difficult to speak about the next PlayStation console at this point, but what lessons have been learned from the current generation, and how is that leading toward the development of the next console? How much of the old technology—like the optical drive—is it necessary to retain?
I'm not talking about next-gen. But in terms of what we have learned, the PS3 is very difficult to make games on. It is so picky and advanced in terms of architecture. We are game developers and we have a difficult time making games on it. The PS Vita was designed with this consideration—to smooth game development so developers can focus on making games. There are other things in terms of the PS3 platform that people have some expectations about, system functionalities we are not able to provide. But there are some good things. We are very big fans of digital distribution and improving games. So on the digital side, I can see doing more and more things in the future.

Blu-ray is a Sony format, though. Does that matter anymore?
It matters. Blu-ray is still the cheapest way to distribute large amounts of content. When you talk about 50 gigabytes of game, how many hours does that take people to download? So that's the easiest medium for delivery. Some people have very fast Internet connectivity, and for those people, digital might be a solution, but there are still many other countries where Internet is not that fast.

The AAA-Teams

SCE Worldwide Studio dev teams have produced a truly impressive array of games. Here's a breakdown of their past and future works.

SCE Bend Studio
Bend, OR

CURRENT HEADLINER
Uncharted: Golden Abyss (PS Vita, 2012)

THE HIT LIST
Resistance: Retribution (PSP, 2009)
Syphon Filter series (PSone, PS2, PSP)

IN THE WORKS
Unannounced. But Bend Studio's recent history does seem to speak to its mastery of portable PlayStation games.

Sucker Punch
Bellevue, WA

CURRENT HEADLINER
inFamous: Festival of Blood (PS3, 2011)

THE HIT LIST
inFamous 2 (PS3, 2011)
inFamous (PS3, 2009)
Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves (PS2, 2005)
Sly 2: Band of Thieves (PS2, 2004)
Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus (PS2, 2002)

IN THE WORKS
Unannounced. But *inFamous 3* would seem to be a safe bet.

SCE Foster City Studio
Foster City, CA

Foster City Studio primarily oversees first-party games worked on by external developers. They've worked on a number of major franchise games.

CURRENT HEADLINER
Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time (PS3/PS Vita, ETA: TBD 2012)

THE HIT LIST
Syphon Filter series (PSone/PS2/PSP)
Jak and Daxter series (PS2, PSP, PS3)
SOCOM series (PS2, PSP, PS3)
Sly Cooper series (PS2, PS3)
Ratchet & Clank series (PS2, PSP, PS3)
Resistance series (PS3, PSP, PS Vita)
Uncharted series (PS3, PS Vita)
inFamous series (PS3)

IN THE WORKS
Unannounced. But what *don't* they work on?

Naughty Dog
Santa Monica, CA

CURRENT HEADLINER
Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception (PS3, 2011)

THE HIT LIST
Uncharted 2: Among Thieves (PS3, 2009)
Uncharted: Drake's Fortune (PS3, 2007)
Jak and Daxter series (PS2)
Crash Bandicoot series (PSone)

IN THE WORKS
The Last of Us (PS3, ETA: TBD 2013)

SCE Santa Monica Studio
Santa Monica, CA

Santa Monica Studio also has an external development branch that funds and provides support for games like Journey and the PixelJunk series.

CURRENT HEADLINER
God of War III (PS3, 2010)

THE HIT LIST
God of War II (PS2, 2007)
God of War (PS2, 2005)

IN THE WORKS
PlayStation All-Stars: Battle Royale (PS3, PS Vita, ETA: Fall)
God of War: Ascension (PS3, ETA: TBD 2013)

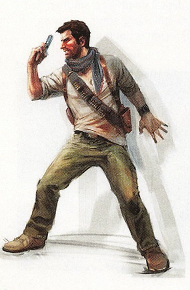
SCE San Diego Studio
San Diego, CA

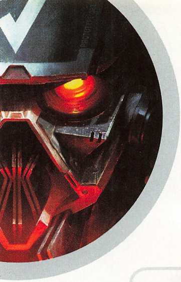
Primarily known for its MLB: The Show games, San Diego Studio also collaborates on external development—especially PS Move titles.

CURRENT HEADLINER
MLB 12: The Show (PS3/PS Vita, 2012)

THE HIT LIST
MLB: The Show series (PS2/PSP/PS3/PS Vita)
Sorcery (PS3, 2012)

IN THE WORKS
Sound Shapes (PS Vita, ETA: August)
MLB 13: The Show (PS3, ETA: 2013)





Guerrilla Games

Amsterdam, Netherlands

CURRENT HEADLINER
Killzone 3 (PS3, 2011)

THE HIT LIST
Killzone 2 (PS3, 2009)
Killzone: Liberation (PSP, 2006)
Killzone (PS2, 2004)

IN THE WORKS
Unannounced. But our trigger finger's itchin' for *Killzone 4*, and there's talk of another new IP in the works as well.

Media Molecule

Guildford, UK

CURRENT HEADLINER
LittleBigPlanet 2 (PS3, 2011)

THE HIT LIST
LittleBigPlanet (PS3, 2008)

IN THE WORKS
Unannounced. Media Molecule is currently collaborating on *LittleBigPlanet Karting* and *LittleBigPlanet Vita*, but what wonders await in its post-*LBP* future?

SCE London Studio

London, UK

London Studio's work skews toward the casual games. What would your kids and non-gaming acquaintances play without them?

CURRENT HEADLINER
EyePet & Friends (PS3, 2011)

THE HIT LIST
SingStar series (PS2/PS3)
EyePet (PS3/PSP, 2009)

IN THE WORKS
Unannounced. But the word is that there's a new PS Move action game in development.

SCE Cambridge Studio

Cambridge, UK

CURRENT HEADLINER
LittleBigPlanet (PSP, 2009)

THE HIT LIST
MediEvil series (PSone/PSP)

IN THE WORKS
Unannounced. But apparently, their current project is an as-yet-untitled *Killzone* game for PS Vita.

SCE Studio Liverpool

Liverpool, UK

Studio Liverpool came into existence as a result of Sony's 2001 acquisition of Psygnosis. It also houses external development studio XDev.

CURRENT HEADLINER
Wipeout 2048 (PS Vita, 2012)

THE HIT LIST
Wipeout series (PS2/PSP/PS3)
Formula One series (PS2/PSP/PS3)

IN THE WORKS
Unannounced. But what wouldn't we give for them to dig *Colony Wars* and *Destruction Derby* out of the old Psygnosis catalog?

Evolution Studios

Runcorn, UK

CURRENT HEADLINER
MotorStorm: Apocalypse (PS3, 2011)

THE HIT LIST
MotorStorm series (PS3/PS Vita)
WRC series (PS2)

IN THE WORKS
Unannounced. But a new *MotorStorm* launch game for the next-gen PlayStation console doesn't seem too much of a stretch.

SCE Japan Studio

Toyko, Japan

CURRENT HEADLINER
Gravity Rush (PS Vita, 2012)

THE HIT LIST
Patapon series (PSP)
LocoRoco series (PSP)
Ape Escape series (PSone/PSP/PS3)

IN THE WORKS
The Last Guardian (PS3, ETA: TBD)
Soul Sacrifice (PS Vita, ETA: TBD)

Polyphony Digital

Tokyo, Japan

CURRENT HEADLINER
Gran Turismo 5 (PS3, 2010)

THE HIT LIST
Gran Turismo series (PSone/PS2/PS3/PSP)

IN THE WORKS
Unannounced. *GT6* will most assuredly arrive someday, but is it time for Polyphony to expand its horizons?

> "We believe people are the most important thing in making games—people's creativity, teamwork, and culture. There has to be good chemistry and a trusting relationship."

NEW BLOOD

A new breed of original PlayStation titles looks to inject a healthy dose of fresh ideas directly into gaming's veins. Meet the ambitious young franchises that may finally cure the common sequel.

BEYOND TWO SOULS

Info

Format PS3
ETA 2013
Pub SCEA
Dev Quantic Dream

Ever since 2010's murder mystery *Heavy Rain*, there's been huge anticipation for French developer Quantic Dream's next major project. Whatever it might be, we expected it to push both gaming technology and our own emotions even further into the unexplored territory opened up by Ethan Mars' tragic story. When we saw the studio's incredible-looking tech demo "Kara" in March of this year, it seemed like everything we'd hoped for. In it, we saw a female android assembled from electronic parts and then marked for destruction because she'd developed pesky self-awareness. By the time E3 2012 came around, excitement had reached a fever pitch, and with the announcement of *Beyond: Two Souls*, we were not disappointed.

As one might expect from *Heavy Rain's* developer, *Beyond* is more of an interactive story than a game, one that looks to push those same narrative boundaries by placing emotional resonance at the core of the overall experience. The star this time: Jodie Holmes. Voiced and motion-captured by genuine superstar Ellen Page (*Juno*, *Inception*), Jodie has access to a variety of psychic abilities thanks to the fact that she's been saddled with a spare soul since birth. Though she doesn't control her ethereal companion directly, he does seek to protect her, meaning his powers are always at her disposal. Naturally, the authorities are keen to capture the pair, but the same powers that make Jodie valuable (including telekinesis, telepathy, and possession) also make her difficult to corner.

In a way, *Beyond* is a return to the themes of Quantic Dream's earlier titles. The inclusion of the supernatural seems like a break with the gritty stylings of *Heavy Rain*, but for anyone familiar with the mystical conspiracy-ridden events of Quantic Dream's earlier output (1999's *The Nomad Soul* and 2005's *Indigo Prophecy*), it came as something of a surprise that *Heavy Rain* concerned a mundane serial killer, with no giant bedbugs or dodgy camera filters at all. The way *Beyond* reintroduces these occult elements is refreshing.

The Experience

There are two main modes of control in the game as there are, in fact, two lead characters: Jodie and her spare soul Aiden. Aiden moves through areas as a free-floating viewpoint, tethered to Jodie by a glowing blue strand of energy. Rather than using complex button inputs, he can interact with objects or people based on their aura: white auras are out of bounds, but yellow and red auras are fair game. Early on, that leads to poltergeist-level nuisance activities (knocking over coffee cups, confusing dogs, and bashing open locked doors). Later, however, things get more serious as Aiden rips down structures and sends armed police officers on murder-suicide rampages.

At one point during the game's early demo, Jodie hides behind a parked car and begs Aiden to save her from the swarm of SWAT cops looking to capture her. As control shifts to the ghost, we are given free rein to possess the police officers and their surroundings. Under his control, vans crash through shop fronts, starting fires; helicopters plough into the ground; armed officers shoot their friends in the back of the head, throw grenades at gas stations, and blow

The DNA

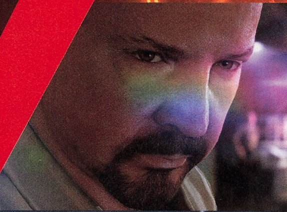
Heavy Rain

+

Ellen Page

+

Poltergeist



▲ Creator David Cage says *Beyond* is about death and what happens to us when we die. Hence the name and the relationship between Jodie and Aiden

> Jodie's psychic abilities are terrifying, distressing things barely in her control

their own brains out; and the climax comes when Aiden smashes into the central clock tower and rips it in half, crushing the policemen below.

Unlike the free roaming Aiden, Jodie moves much like the protagonists in *Heavy Rain*: she's steered with one analog-stick as a variety of context-sensitive commands appear next to things she can interact with. Of course, the harder a movement is, the more complex the inputs get. Opening a door is easier than, say, clambering up a wet cliff face. (Remember the finger-straining agony of guiding Ethan through a glass-strewn tunnel?)

Quantic Dream has made one welcome change from previous titles, though: chase sequences are now actively controlled by the player in the game's engine rather than simply being cutscenes with different endings triggered by button pushes. During that same early demo, Jodie flees from the police through a rainy forest and has to negotiate low-hanging branches, steep hills, and unexpected ditches. The entire level is open; the route we take to lose the cops is up to us.

Combat also seems more active than previous Quantic Dream games. At one point later in the forest, Jodie is ambushed by a pack of police dogs, triggering a combat sequence in which enemies leap at her and quick-time button pushes counter, defend, and attack. At no point does Aiden the friendly ghost pop up to help. Instead, Jodie rips a branch off a tree and beats the dogs back as they lunge at her. She even cracks one in the head with a rock when it tries to tear at her face. Clearly having a ghost living in your head isn't a get-out-of-jail-free card.

The Expectations

Precisely what takes place in the story—aside from running away from stuff and hitting things with sticks—isn't clear, as Quantic Dream is keeping quiet on exact details at this early date. However, we know the game takes place over 15 years, so it's likely that we'll have at least one flashback and probably a few opportunities to press X to stare mournfully at a grave. Maybe we'll even push down on the control stick to kneel beside it or frantically tap R1 to hold back the tears. And there'll be plenty of mundane activities, of course, because it wouldn't be a Quantic Dream title without them.

Still, Jodie's abilities and the game's fierce commitment to character depth bode well for the final experience. Because this is an interactive story, we can afford to lose some of the direct connection we'd normally feel with a protagonist in a game. Jodie's self-reliance and use of hand-to-hand violence, rather than taking the easy option by using Aiden's help, stands up to scrutiny, and the game's implementation of Aiden's powers seems especially promising. Too often, supernatural powers in games are reduced to the level of weapons and tools. The last *Harry Potter* game, for all its Move support, was a third-person shooter with generic weapons that happened to be shaped like wands. *Beyond* is different. Her psychic abilities are terrifying, distressing things barely in her control that she uses only as a last resort. Displaying supernatural powers in a game while retaining their inhuman, unsettling quality is a tricky balance, but Quantic Dream might just pull it off.

WATCH DOGS

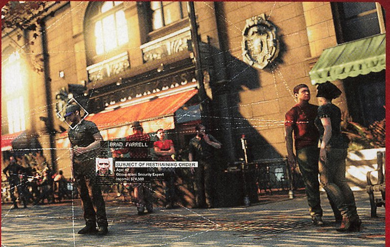
Info
Format PS3
ETA 2013
Pub Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft Montreal

Watch Dogs takes the impeccable open-world craftsmanship of *Assassin's Creed* and applies that formula to modern-day Chicago, in which the mightiest weapon of all isn't physical—it's digital. Skilled hacker Aiden Pearce can take control of cameras, phones, and other devices around him to identify, confuse, and take down targets.

The Experience

The precious little shown of *Watch Dogs* has already spilled an alarming number of possibilities for altering the world around Pearce. While his overall intentions are unclear, he's described as an antihero, and the initial demo shows him tracking down a criminal in Chicago's downtown Loop.

Looking around the urban metropolis, he can highlight hackable electronic devices in his vicinity and then manipulate them with ease. We see him interfere with the phone reception outside of a guarded venue to pull a chatty bouncer from his post. Once inside the building, Pearce is able to identify potential threats via intimate details like income, occupation, and reputation that he gleans by electronically scanning the room and digitally eavesdropping on people's phone conversations. Nearby motorists aren't immune to his techno-prowess either, as we watch him trigger a massive collision by playing with the traffic lights—in this case to slow down the aforementioned criminal.

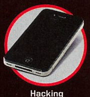


While on-the-fly hacking and data collection are certainly a major part of the experience, don't expect *Watch Dogs* to be devoid of action. Pearce is also skilled with his retractable baton (he's shown dismantling a guard with a couple swift movements) and can clearly handle a firearm: The game slows down at points during a cover-based shootout in the street to dramatically spotlight the shuddering recoil of his arm with each fired round. Pearce can even scale buildings and elevated train tracks with ease to get the jump on his enemies.

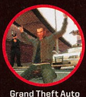
The DNA

Assassin's Creed

+


Hacking

+


Grand Theft Auto

The Expectations

Developed by *Assassin's Creed* studio Ubisoft Montreal, *Watch Dogs* looks to be a major new property for the publisher, as well as a significant evolution of the open-world genre. Games like *Grand Theft Auto* are praised for their "go anywhere, do anything" style of design, but here, players' actions aren't simply physical. Hacking seems to inform nearly every element of the experience, from scoping out threats to altering traffic lights while driving to evade pursuing vehicles. Such breezy manipulation of technology might not seem realistic, but *Watch Dogs* aims to make hacking feel as powerful as, say, Cole McGrath's electrical abilities in *inFamous*—and then some!

Moreover, the guiding theme of dwindling personal privacy in an era in which we're surrounded by phones, tablets, laptops, and other devices may well strike a nerve, giving *Watch Dogs* the potential to deliver some heady storytelling in a genre where narrative sometimes takes a backseat to action.

INJUSTICE
GODS AMONG US

To *Mortal Kombat* fans, *Injustice: Gods Among Us* may not actually seem all that new. Series creator NetherRealm built a fighting game around DC's stable of superheroes once before, producing the somewhat neutered *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe*. So what's going to set *Injustice* apart from the studio's previous projects? Dark themes, new depth, and a whole lot of attention to detail. This isn't just a sugarcoated *Mortal Kombat* with a Superman skin pasted on top of Sub-Zero. *Injustice* takes its own distinct approach to the fighting genre, and unlike *MK vs. DC*, it's not afraid to shed a little blood.

The DNA

Mortal Kombat

+

Justice League

+

The Dark Knight

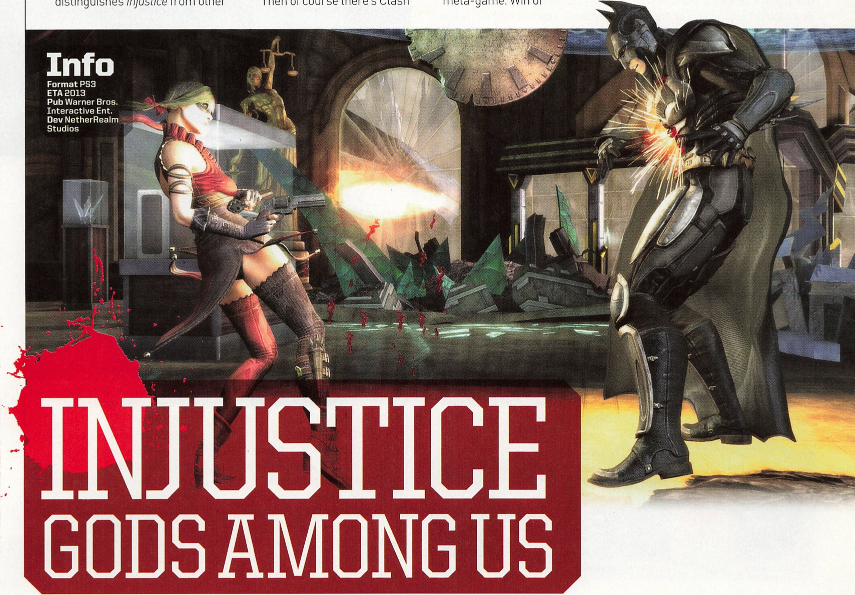
The Experience

While the game's dark, gritty atmosphere is certainly welcome (and fitting, considering the source material), what really distinguishes *Injustice* from other fighters is its commitment to DC's characters. Not only do their personalities shine through, their unique abilities actually inform the game's fighting mechanics. For example, *Injustice* features a dedicated "trait button" that produces a different character-specific effect for each of the game's heroes. For Harley Quinn, it generates a random object like a power-up or a melee weapon. For Batman, it activates a trio of mechanical bats that can be used as a shield or fired off as projectiles.

Then of course there's Clash mode, a dynamic, accessible take on the classic combo breaker system. Once an opponent begins a volley of attacks, the defender can break the combo by initiating a cinematic showdown that's specific to the two combatants. As the characters dramatically exchange threats, players invisibly wager a certain portion of their super meter. Once action resumes, the player who wagered more delivers a crushing blow but also expends the wagered amount of meter, creating a cerebral risk/reward meta-game. Win or lose, though, both players get to enjoy some superhero smack talk.

The Expectations

With a roster of 20-plus fighters that includes the likes of Wonder Woman, Joker, and The Flash, we're likely to see an extremely diverse mix of fighting styles with a fair bit more nuance than other NetherRealm games. And it's important to note that, while *Mortal Kombat*-specific features like one-button super combos return, many of the fighting system's basic functions further set *Injustice* apart: air combos, strategic interaction with the environments, even the blocking system more closely resembles *Street Fighter* than *Mortal Kombat*. Best of all, DC seems to have placed a great deal of trust in the developer's hands. This time around, the gloves are off.

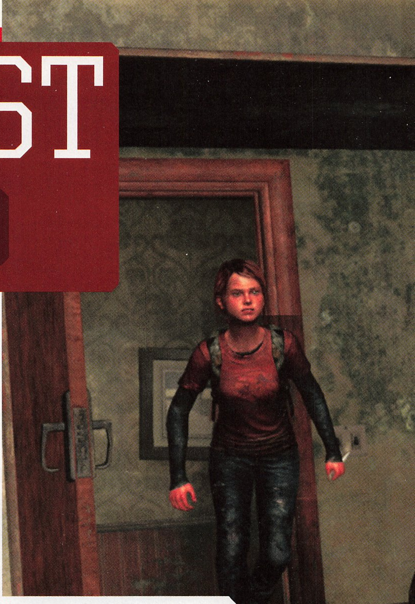


Info

Format PS3
ETA 2013
Pub Warner Bros. Interactive Ent.
Dev NetherRealm Studios

THE LAST OF US

Info
Format PS3
ETA 2013
Pub SCEA
Dev Naughty Dog



The Last of Us's violence is brutal, stark, and realistic, infused with a desperate bid for survival.

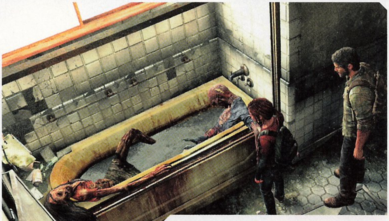
It was the shot heard round the gaming world. When protagonist Joel blew off a man's face before the poor soul could even finish pleading for his life, everyone watching got chills. In a medium where violence is entirely commonplace, the final moment of Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us* demo at E3 2012 still managed to shock us. But it wasn't gratuitous or exploitative or crass. In the context of a post-apocalyptic fight for survival, the moment perfectly captured the genuine fear and desperation that informs every moment of a survivor's life.

The Experience

When we later saw that same demo behind closed doors, Joel and his pint-sized sidekick Ellie entered the damaged building via a new route. He spots a ladder on a floor above, so Ellie clambers up to get it. The combat is tackled more stealthily, with Joel edging to a new window and lobbing a bottle inside to distract the guards. "What was that? Rats or something?" utters a foe before Joel sneaks around to choke him out. "Not a f—king word!" urges Joel, as the guard hisses and splutters. Joel and Ellie sneak into a grimy bathroom (with two dead "infected" in the bathtub) and find bandages in a cupboard.

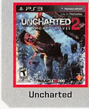
The next section is as violent as the main E3 demo, only different. "What the f—k!" shouts a guard as Joel brutally smashes him with a pipe. The juxtaposition between silence and violence is what lends *The Last of Us* its impact and power. One second, all we can hear are tweeting birds, creaky floorboards, heavy breathing, or a leaky tap—the next, we're genuinely startled by the crack of steel on skull or the explosion of a revolver. Ellie covers her ears and cowers when a gun is fired, and looks visibly shaken when examining the body of a guard, blood slowly seeping across the floor. It's almost as if she's shocked by the actions of the person she most trusts.

At the demo's end, Joel and Ellie locate an elevator shaft (press R2 to see clues). They clamber onto the elevator car's roof, and its coils heave ominously before Joel boosts Ellie (with Triangle) to the floor above. Suddenly, the lift collapses, and Ellie looks on helplessly as Joel crashes many floors below into water, nursing an injured arm. "Joel! Joel!" she cries. "I'm all right," he barks, panting for breath. Joel wades through deep water in a dark corridor wielding a spot lit pistol as music fades into black as the demo ends.



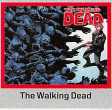
Horrific reminders of civilization's fall abound. So much for that soothing bubble bath...

The DNA



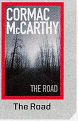
Uncharted

+



The Walking Dead

+



The Road

The Expectations

We *know* that the action is brutal and fantastic, but we also see a great deal of potential in the game's narrative premise. Joel remembers the world before the fungus outbreak, but Ellie has only ever known the martial law of the quarantine zones. Their journey explores the worst *and* best of humanity, so we won't just battle survivors but meet farming communities still striving to create a better life as well. *The Last of Us* also portrays nature as a regenerative source, where man is the destroyer. It's easily the most exciting exclusive on PS3, and we can't wait to learn its deepest, darkest secrets.

SOUL SACRIFICE

Info
Format PS Vita **Pub** SCEA
Dev SCE Japan Studio **ETA** 2013

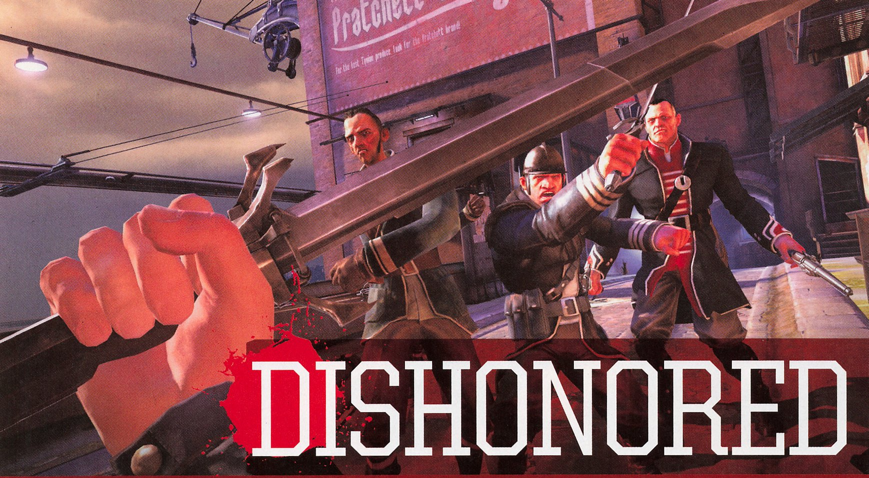
A bizarre RPG in which everyone's a sorcerer, *Soul Sacrifice* brings us to a world where magic ability is earned only through sacrifice—which in this case means sacrificing items, enemies, friends, and even our own body parts for power.

The Experience

Our time with *Soul Sacrifice* revealed an action-RPG in which magical attacks are powered by our stocks of items and—when those run out—by the bodies of our fallen enemies, which we can "save" or "sacrifice" for different rewards and penalties. It also involved bringing down a lot of fairly big monsters—incredibly fun.

The Expectations

It's difficult to be sure what to make of *Soul Sacrifice* at this point, but the fact that it's the brainchild of Keiji Inafune—best known as one of the creators of *Mega Man* and *Onimusha*—means this morally charged RPG has a lot of promise. And anything that lets us rip out our own spine to use as a sword is something we're interested in seeing more of.



DISHONORED

Though framed former bodyguard Corvo may be dishonored, he's also incredibly empowered. Armed with an array of otherworldly powers—including teleportation, possession, and time manipulation—he's free to tackle *Dishonored's* remarkably open-ended missions in any way he sees fit, be it total stealth or whirling vortex of murder and chaos. Though each mission exists only within a contained area, play possibilities blossom in every direction...if we're creative.

The Experience

During our extended hands-on session, the devs dropped us into one such mission equipped with literally every power a budding supernatural assassin could ever dream of: trip mines, a swarm of rodents, a high-powered pistol, a telekinetic whirlwind—the list makes *BioShock's* plasmids look hopelessly quaint. Needless to say, however, this incredible wealth of options proved a bit overwhelming. We could tell the game had given us all the necessary tools to do something totally badass, but we lacked the skill and imagination to figure out exactly what that *was*.

Despite this ineptitude, we did our best to mix and match Corvo's abilities to grand effect as we gradually negotiated our way into a heavily guarded building in search of a missing scientist. *Dishonored's* steampunk-inspired whaling town oozes life and detail, drawing us into the world even more effectively than the similarly structured *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*. And much like that game, we were able to avoid confrontation by finding stealthy paths through the impeccably designed environment.

Unfortunately for us, however, *Dishonored's* guards aren't fooled by simple shadows (stealth is based more on sound, proximity, and line of sight), so we were soon forced to test the game's hand-to-hand combat, which is gut-wrenchingly brutal. Corvo's default melee weapon forced us to carefully counter the surprisingly adept enemies, but after delivering a killing blow, we were treated to a bloody, cringe-worthy animation.

Eventually we began to experiment more with Corvo's talents as we dispatched guards: we froze time to place a proximity mine and possessed a guard to walk him into an electrified force field. Swapping between our weapons and abilities proved simple enough as both are mapped to opposite shoulder buttons—similar to *BioShock 2's* approach to dual-wielding plasmids and firearms. By the time we finally located the scientist, most of his soldiers were long dead, making our escorted exit far, far easier than our entrance.

The Expectations

Though the revenge-focused premise doesn't leave much room for story, the idea of a supernatural assassin is certainly intriguing, and the idea of a supernatural assassin who can succeed without actually killing anyone...now *that's* an angle. We just hope the full campaign can ease us into Corvo's skill set a little more gently than our demo.

Info

Format PS3
Pub Bethesda Softworks
Dev Arkane Studios
ETA October

The DNA

PS3
Deus Ex
Human Revolution

Deus Ex: Human Revolution

+

Steampunk

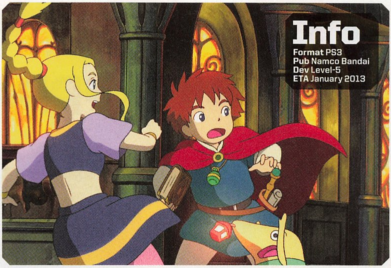
+

Kill Bill
Volume 1

Kill Bill

NI NO KUNI

WRATH OF THE WHITE WITCH



Info
Format PS3
Pub Namco Bandai
Dev Level-5
ETA January 2013

A collaboration between Japan's most beloved animation studio and one of its most interesting developers, *Ni no Kuni* is the beautifully animated story of Oliver, a boy who discovers a magical parallel world after the death of his mother—along with a way to possibly bring her back.

The Experience

A traditional Japanese RPG at first glance, *Ni no Kuni* features everything we've come to expect: wandering around on a big, open-world map filled with monsters, strolling through cities to chat up the inhabitants, and crawling through fiend-infested dungeons. However, the game is incredibly striking to look at, as the cel-shaded visuals, detailed environments, quirky charm, and incredibly fluid movement combine to create the impression of a three-dimensional cartoon.

It also takes a unique approach to combat. Oliver and his friends Esther and Swaine can fight their enemies directly, but they're fairly weak, with a limited roster of abilities. But by summoning a magical "familiar" (each character has at least one) to take their places on the semi-open battlefield, we can greatly increase their abilities and, more importantly, their odds of survival. Those familiars need to be kept healed, however, because when they go down, so does their corresponding hero.

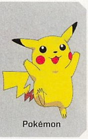
The Expectations

Developer Level-5 has produced some pretty spectacular RPGs in its time (*White Knight Chronicles* notwithstanding), and *Ni no Kuni* looks like a strong return to form for the studio—or at least one of the best-looking RPGs we've ever seen. In any case, we've enjoyed everything we've played thus far thanks to the fascinating world, high-quality localization job, and fun combat mechanics (which, at one point, had us battling a giant pig-snouted tank). Plus, the possibility of a story that explores heavy themes of grief and loss through the lens of a whimsical, achingly beautiful adventure has us intrigued.

The DNA

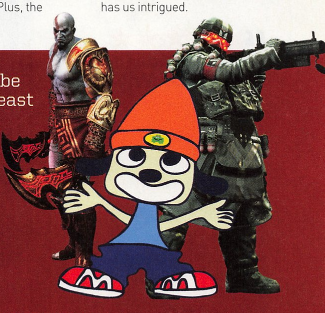
Rogue Galaxy

スタジオジブリ作品
STUDIO GHIBLI
Studio Ghibli


Pokémon

THE REST ...

These remaining new IPs may be last, but they're certainly not least



Quantum Conundrum

Format PSN **ETA** Out now
Pub Square Enix **Dev** Airtight Games

A charming puzzler from the creator of *Portal*. Check out our review on p.84!

Papo & Yo

Format PSN **ETA** Fall
Pub SCEA **Dev** Minority Studios

Another personality-filled puzzler, but with a Latin twist. Check this one out further on p.17.

Enemy Front

Format PS3 **ETA** TBA 2012
Pub/Dev City Interactive

Dev Stuart Black's latest in a long line of over-the-top shooters.

PlayStation All-Stars: Battle Royale

Format PS3 **ETA** Holiday
Pub SCEA **Dev** SuperBot Ent.

Sony's most famous mascots duke it out in this wild free-for-all brawler.

Sleeping Dogs

Format PS3 **ETA** August
Pub Square Enix **Dev** United Front Games

Though once a *True Crime* sequel, it's been reimagined and reincarnated.

Sound Shapes

Format PS Vita **ETA** August
Pub SCEA **Dev** Queasy Games

Use Vita's touchscreens to create music and traverse levels. A true original!

Hell Yeah! Wrath of the Dead Rabbit

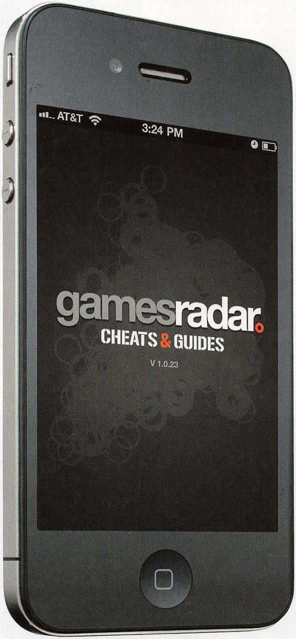
Format PSN **ETA** TBD 2012
Pub Sega **Dev** Arkedo Studio

An evil bunny side-scrolls his way through hell in a jet-powered saw wheel.

“★★★★★”

Amazing app, and it's FREE!

by Vitsnuklz



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CINEMA
NEW YORK CITY
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PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Reviews

Your essential guide to new releases

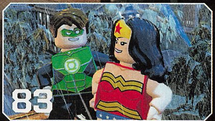
We can't even count the number of times a military shooter has told us to "stay frosty," and frankly, enough is enough. Don't get us wrong, we love *Call of Duty* just as much as the next gamer, but these types of games simply don't challenge us, mentally or ethically. The justification for violence is always black and white and paper thin: We're heroes, they're terrible, let's go kick some ass.

That's why when we're faced with a game like *Spec Ops: The Line*, we're caught somewhat by surprise (in the best way). This is a game that makes us truly examine the choices we make and question our own motives. We're excited to see more games trending toward this kind of thought-provoking inner conflict, not only because it makes our experience with the game so much more rewarding, but also because it's proof that game's can offer more than mindless violence.

There will always be a place in our hearts and room on our hard drives for kill-'em-all action hero games, but sometimes, we want to be scared, confused, and desperate for answers. Sometimes we want to know we've crossed a line and there's no going back.

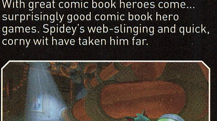
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

With great comic book heroes come... surprisingly good comic book hero games. Spidey's web-slinging and quick, corny wit have taken him far.



LEGO BATMAN 2

Not to be outdone by Marvel, DC heroes star in their own game this month, only in a blockier, non-movie-affiliated way. Which hero(es) shall prevail?



QUANTUM CONUNDRUM

We're faced with quite a pickle. A puzzle. An enigma, if you will. The problem is, we're running desperately low on synonyms for "conundrum" and we still have to finish writing this caption. See how that might be a problem?

How we score our reviews...

10 Awesome
Instant classic that's nearly PlayStation perfection.

9 Excellent
Highly recommended and a great investment.

8 Great
Wonderful yet possesses minor flaws.

7 Good
Enjoyable but with definite room for improvement.

6 Acceptable
A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.

5 Mediocre
A game that's both fun and frustrating in equal measure.

4 Flawed
Too flawed to be anything more than a curiosity.

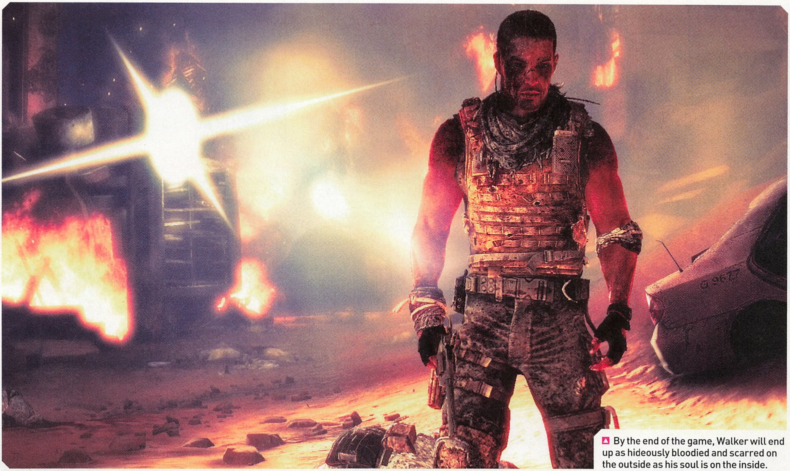
3 Poor
A seriously defective game with no long-term appeal.

2 Awful
A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it like the plague.

1 Raw Sewage
Apparently, feces *can* be pressed on a disc.

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation

Our Highest Accolade
The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near-flawless gameplay, great graphics, and profound appeal.



By the end of the game, Walker will end up as hideously bloodied and scarred on the outside as his soul is on the inside.

Spec Ops The Line

The horror...the horror...

Games and violence have had a comfortable partnership for decades now, bolstered in part by the notion that—no matter what terrifying things we're tasked with, no matter how many imaginary lives we end—the violence we commit is justified, even heroic. In the past few years, we've seen games that poke at that idea (like *BioShock* and *Shadow of the Colossus*), pushing us to question exactly what it is that drives us forward, whether it's right, and whether we were ever really in control of this fantasy to begin with.

While others made this point subtly, *Spec Ops: The Line* is unapologetically savage about it. Slapping aside the "oorah" mentality of so many other military shooters and challenging their very notion of heroism, *Spec Ops* forces us to blunder through one catastrophically bad decision after another, shoves our faces in the terrible results, and snarls at us for creating so much tragedy. As it keeps reminding us, *we're* ultimately the ones in control of this horror, even if we feel helpless to stop it. We could, after all, quit playing, walk away, and live life with a clear conscience. But really, what fun would that be?

Info

Format PS3
Pub 2K Games **Dev** Yager
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Mature
It's like *Apocalypse Now* with more sand and creepier hallucinations.

It's Only Entertainment

For all its intended bleakness, *Spec Ops* really *is* fun. As a cover shooter, it's smartly designed and enjoyable, filled with memorable firefights that force us to make constant use of cover while our enemies try to outflank and overwhelm us. And as a narrative, it's riveting, with compelling twists and a dark, madness-tinged sense of humor that keeps the experience from ever becoming outright depressing.

Want More?

Be sure to download *Spec Ops'* free co-op DLC, which adds a handful of two-player missions that, much like *Call of Duty's* Special Ops mode, are separate from the main campaign and built for replayability.

The story of an obsessive hunt for an enigmatic rogue commander, *Spec Ops* owes a hefty debt to *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*, but still manages to strike out in its own directions and surprise us. Focusing on three Delta Force operatives—protagonist Capt. Martin Walker and his squadmates, Lt. Adams and Sgt. Lugo—the game is set entirely in the metropolitan Arabian city of Dubai, now reduced to an inaccessible wasteland by cataclysmic sandstorms. An American infantry regiment, the 33rd, was sent in to evacuate Dubai's populace but hasn't been heard from in months. After a despairing radio transmission from the 33rd's MIA commander, John Konrad, ▶▶

Legacy of Meh Five forgotten games from *Spec Ops'* prolific past

PlayStation
SPEC OPS:
STEALTH PATROL

SPEC OPS: STEALTH PATROL
(PSone, 2000)
Critics dismissed this two-player tactical shooter, but at $10, it sold anyway.

PlayStation
SPEC OPS
RANGER ELITE

SPEC OPS: RANGER ELITE
(PSone, 2001)
The follow-up didn't add much aside from new missions, but for some, that was enough.

PlayStation
SPEC OPS:
COVERT ASSAULT

SPEC OPS: COVERT ASSAULT
(PSone, 2001)
Not much new here, either, but like the rest of these games, it's now a $6 download on PSN.

PlayStation
SPEC OPS
AIRBORNE COMMANDO

SPEC OPS: AIRBORNE COMMANDO
(PSone, 2002)
The shift to lone-soldier action was different, but not enough to make much of an impact.

SPEC OPS
(PS2, Canceled)
Sadly (or not), the PS2 iteration was canned, freeing Rockstar Vancouver to make *Bully* instead.

Walker and his squad are sent in to assess the situation and rescue any survivors.

Of course, this plan quickly goes south. What starts as a recon mission devolves first into a fight for survival and then a relentless manhunt for Konrad. Walker and crew careen from one awful situation to the next, never fully comprehending their situation as they plow through the hostile survivors of the 33rd (who appear to have declared themselves the brutal overlords of Dubai) and what's left of the civilian population, who've taken up arms against anything in camo.

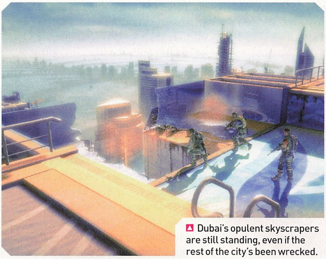
As they march deeper into the insanity, Walker and crew are occasionally confronted with some unpleasant decisions. Should we rescue a vital informant, or save the civilians we came to Dubai to help in the first place? Should Walker use his last bullet to execute a man pinned under a truck, or leave him to be burned alive? These don't really affect the story's direction so much as they do our perception of what kind of man Walker is. Whatever we decide, he'll continue barreling through to the inevitable conclusion, leaving destruction and misery in his wake. However, the choices are strangely compelling, and it's worth playing through a second time just to see how things could have gone differently.

Meanwhile, most of the really *big* decisions—like the one to use insanely cruel white-phosphorous mortars against the 33rd—aren't actually decisions at all, despite being presented that way. Nevertheless, the game does its best to make us question our actions, even when there's only one real option available to us. Walker becomes steadily more haunted by the things he's seen and done, forced to cling to the mission as his only constant in the madness. Adams and Lugo grow confrontational to the point that their hatred for Walker—and, by extension, us—is barely concealed. Even the game's loading screens taunt us with messages like "Do you feel like a hero yet?" And that's just the start of how *Spec Ops* tries to mess with our heads.

The Battle of Dubai

Spec Ops doesn't fall short when it comes to gameplay, either. There's nothing particularly special about its approach to sticky-cover shooting, but it's quick and fun, with clever enemies and lots of memorably designed encounters in unique environments—like an abandoned mall, a sandy yacht graveyard, and the upper floors of Dubai's skyscrapers—that kept us looking forward to what was around the next corner. (Thanks to the unforgiving checkpoint system, though, we often saw around that corner more times than we'd liked.)

Walker can carry two guns at a time and needs to make continual use of sticky (and frequently destructible) cover to survive. Three varieties of



▲ Dubai's opulent skyscrapers are still standing, even if the rest of the city's been wrecked.

Cast List

THE "HERO"

Capt. Martin Walker
Walker just wants to do the right thing. But can he?

THE GUNNER

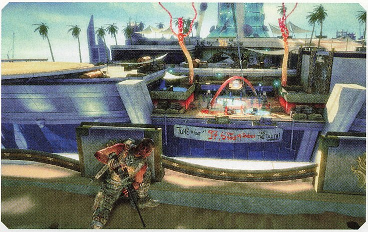
Lt. Adams
The squad's moral center, only Adams grasps how FUBAR the mission is.

THE MARKSMAN

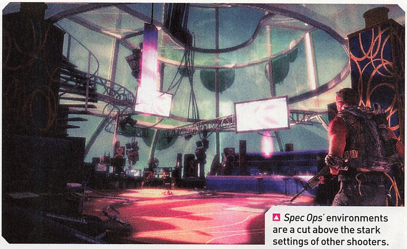
Sgt. Lugo
A multitalented smartass, not even Lugo's good humor survives for long.

THE "VILLAIN"

Col. John Konrad
Does he want to break Walker, or just make him face the truth?



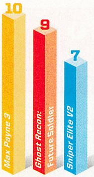
Dubai may have gone mad, but "madness" doesn't always have to mean "bleak and depressing." It's somehow more unsettling that way.



Spec Ops' environments are a cut above the stark settings of other shooters.

grenade—frag, sticky, and flash—can be aimed without breaking cover, which is convenient, and if enemies get too close, we can vault over our cover and kick them in the face. Meanwhile, squadmates Adams and Lugo operate more or less independently, although we can order them to focus on a single troublesome enemy by simply aiming and pressing a button.

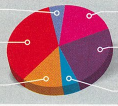
Spec Ops does bring a couple of unique touches to its combat, too. For example, downed enemies frequently need to be "executed," which involves a random action that can be anything from a knockout punch to a brutal rifle-butting to an even more brutal gun-in-the-mouth slaying (which always elicits a slight cringe). Sand also plays a pretty significant role; much of Dubai is clogged with the stuff, so whenever we see it trickling out through a window, vent, or closed door, it's a sure bet that there's a literal ton of sand just behind it. Shooting whatever's holding the sand back will unleash it onto anyone standing nearby, stunning or even crushing them under a small avalanche. Sandstorms also crop up every so often, slowing our movement and making enemies hard to see while partially hiding us from them.



ScorePole

Spec Ops isn't the best of the recent crop of cover shooters, but it's still a strong contender.

What we did in... Spec Ops: The Line



5% Felt uncomfortable about shooting rogue American troops.

35% Got over that discomfort, kept shooting.

13% Stopped to marvel at really expensive-looking scenery

18% Horrible things. Just *horrible*.

24% Dove for cover behind barricades to escape hails of machinegun fire.

5% Cursed as we scuttled away from shattered barricades to find new cover.

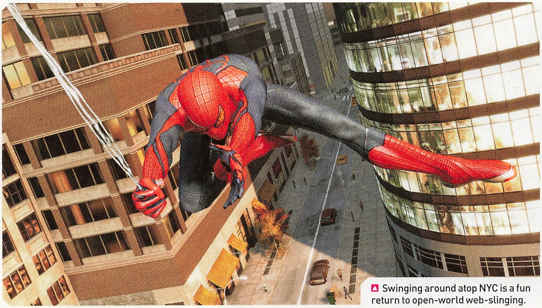
Another, less obvious unique touch: hearing the familiar, professional-soldier battle chatter we've been conditioned to expect from our *own* side come from the enemy is more than a little jarring. *Spec Ops* loves to mess with us, and in later stages, as the burden of the things Walker has done grows heavier, his instability begins to manifest as hallucinations. It's easy to be too goofy with this stuff, but *Spec Ops* handles it smartly enough that the effect is creepy, unsettling, and unforgettable.

What Came Before

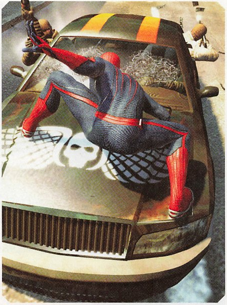
Spec Ops' multiplayer has little of the campaign's creepiness, but it's still a pleasant surprise. Focusing on the civil war that erupted when the 33rd decided to stay in Dubai, it features a small selection of familiar, four-on-four match types that can be fought in multi-tiered environments filled with ziplines, sand traps, and interesting things to shoot. Its museum level, for example, features dinosaur skeletons and a couple of elevators that can be dropped on enemies. Sandstorms erupt periodically, disrupting our radar, slowing our movement (if we're caught outside), and drowning out headset chatter from teammates. Toss in a leveling system that can unlock new weapons and other rewards as we play, and it's a surprisingly fun add-on to an already impressive game.

While it's marred by frequent visual pop-in and frustrating checkpoint placement, *Spec Ops* is nevertheless a pretty significant achievement. It prods at us without getting preachy, it's downbeat without being discouraging, and it puts a heavy emphasis on creating an involving story while still being fun to play. *Spec Ops* is a clever, subversive, and darkly funny take on military shooters that dares to challenge us. The real tragedy will be if its intended audience mistakes it for just another *Call of Duty* clone. **MIKEL REPARAZ**

PlayStation The Official Magazine
8



Swinging around atop NYC is a fun return to open-world web-slinging.



The Amazing Spider-Man

Back to web-swinging roots

Stan is the Man

As far as pre-order DLC goodies go, the ability to sling webs and kick ass as Spider-Man creator Stan Lee is an awesome reward for early adopters. In addition to a charming race mission to recover missing script pages scattered across NYC, tackling side-quests as Stan is a real treat.

Ditching all the outlandish dimension-hopping and time-bending gimmicks of *Shattered Dimensions* and *Edge of Time*, *The Amazing Spider-Man* shoots for a more grounded superhero adventure and really hits the mark of what makes suiting up as everyone's favorite neighborhood web-slinger such a blast. The franchise's welcome return to an open-world format also brings some much needed balance to the constrained nature of Spidey's other recent outings.

While it picks up shortly after the ending of the new film, the game feels more like an authentic standalone installment than a mere movie tie-in. Without spoiling the over-arching plot elements that carry over from the film, it's safe to say Spider-Man winds up battling giant killer robots, a horde of mutant creatures, and gangs of petty thugs in a satisfying, well-penned romp that spins out above and below the streets of New York City. Pummeling enemies through sprawling indoor stages contrasts nicely against the more spectacular set-piece boss encounters, but what really resonates is the freedom that comes from once again swinging around the beautifully detailed city between story missions.

Info

Format PS3
Pub Activision **Dev** Beenox
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Everyone 10+
It's like classic Spider-Man action as it should be.

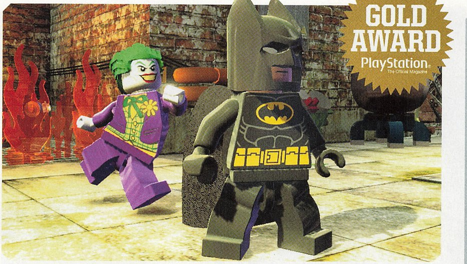
Fluid, frenetic combat showcases Spidey's agility with an array of dazzling flourishes and unlockable moves that keep up a brisk pace when we're destroying evil. The tighter third-person camera makes cracking skulls a pleasantly intimate affair, but it also sometimes gets in the way of the action during busier sequences, particularly as we're scaling walls or zipping across rooms in midair. When they're not tripped up by occasional camera wonkiness, however, the brawling segments and boss battles are immensely fun.

The all-new web-rush mechanic adds a cool dynamic to navigating around levels and diving in to dish out brutal beat-downs. Triggering web-rush temporarily slows down time and switches everything to a first-person perspective that lets us aim around the screen and target a blast of webbing to zip line to nearby perches or ensnare a foe and swoop in for a surprise attack. It generally works very well, enabling us to pull off some stunning mid-air maneuvers on the fly.

Spider-Man's barrage of corny puns returns as expected, adding a light-hearted touch of humor, and the sharp acting is on par with the highl level of polish found throughout the game. Simply put: this game looks and sounds great, and after some gimmicky missteps with the last few franchise entries, we're pleasantly surprised to find this is the Spider-Man game we've been yearning for, not just another licensed tie-in.

PlayStation
The Official Magazine
8

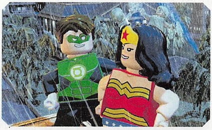
NATHAN MEUNIER



GOLD AWARD
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

LEGO Batman 2
DC Super Heroes

We're going to need a lot more bricks...



Mid-level checkpoints are a welcome addition, ensuring minimal progression loss.

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** Warner Bros. Interactive Ent. **Dev** TT Games **Price** $59.99 **ESRB** Everyone 10+ **It's like** an amusement park built around our favorite playground.

There's no denying the appeal of the *LEGO* videogame series. The deft blend of block-smashing gameplay, personality-laden story, and quirky signature take on popular media entities ranging from *Star Wars* to *Harry Potter* have earned it a loyal following that spans young and old, casual and hardcore. So while it's no shock that *LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes* succeeds admirably as a platformer, we were surprised to find that it also manages to reinvigorate a series that has every reason to feel overly familiar and tiresome by now.

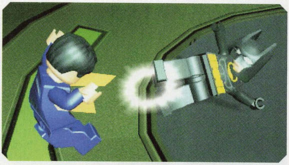
Heroes' story campaign follows the general gameplay blueprint of its *LEGO* predecessors. We roam sprawling 3D levels as Batman and Robin, battling super villains and their thugs while exploring every nook and cranny and smashing most everything in sight to earn LEGO studs that can be used to purchase vehicles, powerups, and other characters. While the tried and true formula remains essentially the same, the levels always seem to contain clever touches that make chasing down Joker, Lex Luthor, and their minions an enjoyable diversion.

On the hero side of the equation, Superman and other Justice League members become available as the campaign progresses, adding a fresh dimension to the character swapping required to successfully complete levels. Cleverly written cinematics (now featuring talking characters) continue to charm and entertain us, and as always, the gameplay shines best when played cooperatively with a couch-bound friend or family member.

But the real star of the show here is the game's all-new openworld Gotham City. *Heroes'* "traditional" *LEGO* campaign took us approximately a dozen hours to play through, but the game registered a mere 20 percent completion rate at the story's conclusion. The rest of the game lies within Gotham's gorgeous, fully-realized streets and buildings that are literally filled with citizens to rescue, secrets to discover and unravel, and more iconic villains to face off against. Whether policing the city's surface from behind the wheel of the Batmobile or soaring to the heights of its skyscrapers as Superman, it's a hugely satisfying addition to the *LEGO* games experience.

PlayStation The Official Magazine **9**

ROGER BURCHILL



No Wi-Fi co-op here, unfortunately, but ad hoc allows local players to join our game for some two-player butt kicking.

LEGO Batman 2
DC Super Heroes

Little bitty LEGO Batman

Info

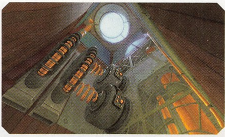
Format PS Vita
Pub Warner Bros. Interactive Ent.
Dev TT Games
Price $39.99
ESRB Everyone 10+
It's like playing a Saturday morning cartoon (and just as short).

For the most part, the bite-sized *LEGO Batman 2* offers the same gameplay and follows the same story as its console counterpart. However, levels are shorter and puzzles tend to be more frustrating. The Vita also ditches the open-world Gotham City sandbox gameplay, which is a pretty big disappointment since that's where most of the post-story fun will be had on PS3. Instead, the Vita relies on Justice League missions that unlock after the Story mode is successfully completed. These missions are more akin to Horde-style modes in other games where players take on wave after wave of enemies, but here, we switch Justice Leaguers between rounds. Since the combat system in the game isn't very deep, however, this content isn't all that compelling.

LEGO Batman 2 on Vita plays like more traditional *LEGO* games, sticking closer to the standard formula than the console version. If you love *LEGO* games and don't have access to a PS3, pick up the game for a fun and familiar experience. Otherwise, just stick to the game's blocky bigger brother.

PlayStation The Official Magazine **6**

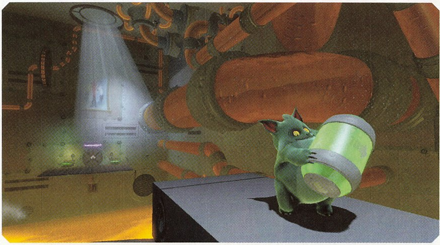
CLINT DEMIRITT



New dimension-shifting powers are obtained gradually, but only one can be activated at any time.

Quantum Conundrum

Now you're thinking with... dimensions



Info

Format PSN
Pub Square Enix
Dev Airtight Games
Price $14.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like a $60 brain-teaser for a fraction of the price.

Instead of portals, there are "dimensions." Instead of GLaDOS, there's a mad scientist uncle. Instead of a series of test chambers, there's a huge mansion full of laboratories and giant vats of science juice. *Quantum Conundrum* is basically *Portal* with new mechanics—not surprising considering it's the brainchild of Kim Swift, one of the masterminds behind Valve's now-iconic puzzle franchise. So no, *Conundrum* is not the most original game, but it's still a smart, delightful puzzler brimming with clever design that does its spiritual predecessor proud.

Its puzzles were simple at first: move an object onto a switch and—*ta-da!*—a door opens elsewhere. This became trickier, however, once bottomless chasms and deadly laser beams started to separate those objects from the switches they were meant to activate. To proceed through the mansion, we made smart use of the Inter-Dimensional Shift (IDS) device (essentially an old-school Nintendo Power Glove) that let us activate four different dimensions, each with unique physics-manipulating properties.

Discovering new ways to take advantage of these dimensions was as exciting as it was intellectually stimulating. Need to move a heavy metal safe? No problem—just activate the Fluffy dimension to make it super light, then flip back to drop it on a switch. Having trouble reaching a high ledge? Enter the Reverse Gravity dimension to ride an object like an elevator. The Slow Motion and Heavy dimensions offer name-appropriate experiences as well.

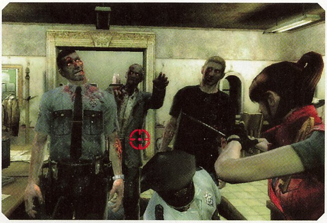
The highlight of *Conundrum*, though, was solving puzzles that required the use of multiple dimensions. Figuring out the best approach to each challenge required a trial-and-error mindset that often left us stumped for minutes at a time. Thankfully, "Eureka!" moments always found us before an unhealthy amount of frustration set in.

Conundrum is not without its slight annoyances, however. That mad scientist uncle? Like GLaDOS in *Portal*, he continually spoke to us as we fumbled our way through his mansion, sometimes making jokes or berating us for breaking his furniture. Unfortunately—and despite his soothing Alec Baldwin-like voice—his quips were mostly uninteresting and unrelated to anything we experienced in the game. The repetitive interior design of his mansion mirrored his bland personality, too. We often lamented the lack of diverse scenery during our eight hours exploring the building.

So while *Conundrum* may not stack up to *Portal* punch for punch, such intelligently designed experiences are few and far between. This is a charming and fun adventure that easily earns its place among PSN's elite—and we could all do with a bit more thinking (whether with portals *or* dimensions) every now and then. **RYAN TALJONICK**

PlayStation
The Official Magazine
9

▲ For those who only want a taste of these less-than-remarkable series spinoffs, *Darkside Chronicles* both looks and controls better.



Resident Evil Chronicles HD Collection

Moving along through more leftovers

Info
Format PSN **Pub** Capcom
Dev Capcom/Cavia
Price $26.99 (or $14.99 each)
ESRB Mature **It's like a** streamlined *Resident Evil* recap.

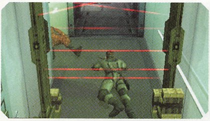
Continuing the wave of PlayStation Move-enabled shooters ported from other platforms, *Resident Evil: Chronicles HD Collection* pulls together a pair of Wii releases—2007's *Umbrella Chronicles* and 2009's *Darkside Chronicles*—both of which reimagine classic entries in the survival-horror series as on-rails slaughter sessions. We can freshly experience events from the first five *Resident Evil* games through the lens of an arcade-style light gun shooter, blasting the undead in and around the Raccoon City Police Department and revisiting the iconic mansion from the series' debut.

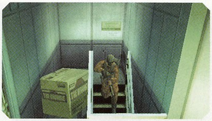
While similar series *The House of the Dead* keeps things lively with quick encounters and a campy aesthetic, *Chronicles'* sluggish stages tend to feel like a grind, especially during the laborious boss encounters. Both *Umbrella Chronicles* and *Darkside Chronicles* are fundamentally solid, but the gunplay fails to excite much beyond the novelty of reliving these memorable adventures with new controls. The HD bump makes both titles look passable as reasonably priced downloads, but the recurring slowdown is a drag.

Resident Evil completionists who missed these simple shooters elsewhere may find them briefly amusing, but casual Move enthusiasts needn't snag both.

PlayStation The Official Magazine **5**

ANDREW HAYWARD





CAMERA
AP SENSR
CIGS
NONE
NONE

Metal Gear Solid HD Collection

Attack of the clones

War, and war games, might have changed and evolved over the past few years, but that can't alter the fact that *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* are two of the best games of all time. And now they're ready to shine again, remastered in HD for PS Vita, making it possible to bring the classic stealth-adventure titles anywhere. Better yet, the versions included here are the most feature-complete editions available, with additional missions and special features.

While we were hoping that the Vita release would provide the quintessential *MGS* experience on the go, the port is not without its flaws. Inventory management is handled via the touchscreen and proved trickier than we'd have liked, and the back touchpad's camera and knife controls often ended up a hindrance instead of an asset. It's also worth noting that *Peace Walker* is not included in the Vita bundle despite being in the PS3 HD collection (available for the same price).

The Vita version does feature "transfarring"—a feature that allows save synchronicity between Vita and PS3 copies of the game—but that's only a benefit if you're desperate to bring a console save with you (not likely).

Still, the *MGS HD Collection* is a great package because the games included are great...even if there are better ways to enjoy them. Vita or PS3, just be sure to take advantage of one of the collections.

PlayStation The Official Magazine **8**

ERICK CEIL

Info

PS VITA
Only On PlayStation
METAL GEAR SOLID
HD COLLECTION
METAL GEAR SOLID 2
METAL GEAR SOLID 3
M
KONAMI

Format PS Vita
Pub Konami
Dev Konami
Price $39.99
ESRB Mature
It's like a war-torn trip down memory lane (again).

NCAA Football 13

Strike the Heisman pose

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** EA Sports
Dev EA Tiburon **Price** $59.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like a yearly update that's actually worthwhile.

The Heisman is the most coveted individual award in college football, and this year, *NCAA Football* delivers an experience worthy of the iconic trophy. The new Heisman Challenge puts us in the shoes of past winners (Robert Griffin III, Doug Flutie, and more than a dozen others), allowing us to attempt to better their records and claim the trophy for our own virtual shelf.

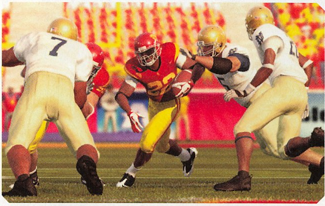
To simulate the enhanced awareness of these college legends, dev EA Tiburon added Reaction Time, which slows the game to a crawl as if our Heisman hero was part of the Matrix. Seeing Barry Sanders bounce off would-be tacklers in slow motion before springing free and taking off down the field is unlike any experience *NCAA Football* delivered in the past.

The core Dynasty mode returns intact but with major improvements to its recruiting system. For example, pitches to recruits now change dynamically as the season wears on.

On field improvements include more realistic defensive A.I., proper QB dropbacks, and pass trajectories that provide gunslingers with more options to get the ball to their receivers. It's not all glory, however, as there are some nagging A.I. bugs, particularly with late-game time management. Still, EA Tiburon delivers a game that might finally challenge *Madden* for the gridiron crown.

PlayStation The Official Magazine
9

HILARY GOLDSTEIN



The passing game has never been better. There's no excuse for failure anymore (except maybe the Gators' offensive line).

TOTAL AP
095
TARGET HP
BREAK
TOTAL DAMAGE 0000002319
15 Hits
×1.15
TOTAL AP
025
TARGET HP
BREAK
TOTAL DAMAGE 0000000313
12 Hits
×1.12

Not pictured: All the uncomfortable sexual content that makes the whole experience feel a little…gross.

Info

Format PS3
Pub Aksys Games
Dev Idea Factory
Price $49.99 ($59.99 for Limited Edition)
ESRB Teen
It's like *Final Fantasy Tactics* but with much more nudity.

Record of Agarest War 2

Down and dirty

This under-the-radar strategy series has been quietly satisfying hardcore tactical gameplay lovers for years, and now, after the first game and its very similar prequel, *Record of Agarest War 2* shakes up the core gameplay in some interesting ways but, sadly, also expands the increasingly perverted side content.

The core strategy gameplay has become a fascinating hybrid of grid-based tactics combat and active time battles that doesn't feel incredibly deep but at least offers new rules for strategy veterans to learn. The addictive combat and team building also kept us more engaged than the simple "angry gods" storyline, which is burdened with tired anime tropes.

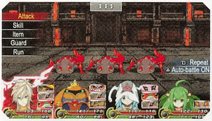
The narrative is at least made unique by its occasional dating minigames and marriage subplots, but that's also the doorway to *Agarest's* more disconcerting aspects. Some might enjoy picking up the Move for bath and massage minigames featuring nearly nude (and awfully young-looking) women, but it felt grossly pandering to us. *Agarest 2* is a competent strategy RPG with satisfying gameplay, but there are better ones out there that we'd be less ashamed to share with our friends.

PlayStation The Official Magazine
7

HENRY GILBERT

Unchained Blades

Format **PSP** Pub **XSEED Games** Dev **FuRyu** Price **$29.99 (download only)** ESRB **Everyone**

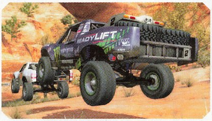


Unchained Blades stars a cruel Dragon Emperor-turned-human, a selfish Phoenix Princess, and a mildly likeable Dryad girl. Each of these characters must traverse a series of dungeons in order to have her wishes granted. Along the way, the protagonists can "unchain" monsters and convince the creatures to follow them and aid in battle. Too bad *Unchained Blades* is painfully repetitive and so heavy with backtracking that we memorized the dungeons. The first-person perspective became disorienting at times, and equipment upgrades proved limited. We appreciated specific parts of the game—such as the leveling, animations, and Followers—but it's still the bottom of the JRPG barrel. **ANNE LEWIS**

PlayStation 4

Jeremy McGrath's Offroad

Format **PSN** Pub **Reverb Publishing** Dev **2XL Games** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Everyone**



Jeremy McGrath's Offroad doesn't much benefit the arcade racing genre. There are just six tracks, two race types, and five vehicles, all of which must be unlocked in Career mode before they'll be available in Arcade mode or Online. The Career forces us to switch vehicles rather than give us a choice, which is an annoying way of familiarizing us with the way each ride handles. We can upgrade our truck's speed and handling as well as tweak our speed/traction/suspension setups, which is nice and all, but the upgrades don't transfer even when we use another vehicle in the same class. The game looks and plays well enough but isn't particularly engaging (unless you're a Jeremy McGrath fan). **ANNE LEWIS**

PlayStation 6

Babel Rising

Format **PSN** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Mondo Productions** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

Ubisoft's take on the ancient biblical myth is a fun distraction, mixing tower defense and god game elements. We, as an angry god, simply smite heretics intent on building the famed Tower of Babel. To that end, elemental powers such as meteors, ice storms, and fiery rain are at our disposal. Each level generally has a set goal (such as smiting so many workers), but the gameplay seldom varies and the levels stretch on too long. Worse, the controls are freeform, leading to frustrating imprecision, especially when using PS Move. *Babel Rising* can be fun and looks great, but needs a lot more refinement before it reaches a biblical level of gaming goodness. **JASON D'APRILE**

PlayStation 6

DLC Roundup

Sniper Elite V2
Assassinate the Führer

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Mature**

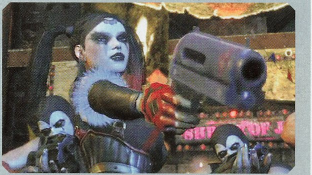
Hit the Alps in an attempt to take down the dictator of all dictators in this short and sweet DLC. Setting our sights on the target may be tougher than expected, but watching Hitler's brains explode in slow motion over and over again makes the effort worthwhile.

Marvel Pinball
Avengers Chronicles

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Everyone**

We spent hours on this addictive four-pack of tables that revolve around the adventures of Earth's Mightiest Heroes. Brimming with source-material evoking cameos, voiceovers, and innovative modes (like Thanos' upside-down playfield), this is virtual pinball at its prime.

Download of the Month



Batman: Arkham City
Harley Quinn's Revenge

Price $9.99 **ESRB** Teen

Picking up shortly after the conclusion of *Arkham City*, Harley Quinn's Revenge lets us play as both Batman and Robin to experience different sides of the same conundrum. The dark knight winds up a bit unstable thanks to the crazier-than-ever Harley Quinn and her thugs. Thankfully, this self-contained adventure doesn't skimp on the evildoer pummeling.

Strike Back

A heaping plate of sex and violence

Info

Price $59.96
Creators Chris Ryan, Daniel Percival
Starring Philip Winchester, Sullivan Stapleton, Jimi Mistry, Amanda Mealing
Rated Not Rated
Extras Episode-specific commentary tracks.

For those who find the current crop of secret agent and anti-terrorism shows too serious and lacking in certain fundamental elements—such as sex, nudity, and crude buddy humor—Cinemax has the perfect antidote. *Strike Back* is a British show through and through, but it's one desperate to emulate the idea of what American action movies and shows are (or, at least, could be).

The one American character (who is not played by one) is a sex-addicted buffoon who gets laid at least once and usually twice each episode (by different lasses, of course) and his partner is a straight-laced, blond, brick wall of a man named, of all things, Stonebridge. There's not a single problem in *Strike Back* that can't be solved through copious amounts of sex and violence, and all women on the show are either baggage-bearing cannon fodder or pure sex objects. Indeed, the show seems intent on placing naked women in as many scenes as possible, no matter how inappropriate.

Yet, for all its questionable morals, *Strike Back* is undeniably entertaining. The overall plot about an elite British anti-terrorist unit hunting down a Pakistani terrorist mastermind (oh yeah, Pakistanis will likely find this show extremely offensive...) is solid. More importantly, the show delivers where it counts: the action is terrific, the girls are gorgeous, and the interplay between the two leads is hilarious.

Strike Back has the quality production values we've come to expect from a modern British show. It's well filmed, impeccably acted, and the violence is frequently unflinching. The idea of two badass agents putting the hurt on small armies seems absurd, but these two guys are actually believable enough in their roles to pull it off, even when the script goes entirely off the logic reservation.

There's also an enjoyable bromance between the two leads carried off with dialogue that is constantly engaging and seldom deviates from their simple stereotypes. This isn't deep, thought-inducing television, but it's not meant to be, and proves a perfect foil to the typical, angst-laden dramas crowding the airwaves.

The limited extras primarily include episode-specific commentary that is decent, if not particularly insightful. The Blu-ray box includes the DVD and digital downloadable versions as well. **JASON D'APRILE**

PlayStation
The Official Magazine
8

Ghost Rider

Spirit of Vengeance

Nic Cage unleashes his inner crazy...again

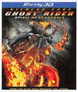
There's no disputing that the second *Ghost Rider* movie, *Spirit of Vengeance*, is absolutely a better film than its incredibly uneven and muddled predecessor. As for actually being a good movie, well, that's another matter.

Directed (but unfortunately not written) by the dynamically and notoriously insane duo of Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor (*Crank* series), *Vengeance* has moments of hilarious greatness. The mixture of classic horror movie effects with modern-day CG fire makes for a visually compelling rendition of Marvel Comic's dark knight. The story deftly ties together two generations of the hero and uses the classic Johnny Blaze versus Satan storyline. Adopting the idea that Ghost Rider turns any vehicle he touches into a blazing hell-bound inferno equates to some terrific and creative action sequences as well.

While the script isn't in danger of hitting a gold standard, the real problem here—as with the original—is Nicolas Cage. He's still trying to channel his inner mental patient and while, thankfully, he doesn't just sit around eating candy, his over-the-top acting style is still borderline embarrassing to watch. We get he's determined to show that Blaze is going insane due to all that guilt and having a demon of hell locked inside him, but Cage is in B-movie territory when he doesn't need to be.

No one else in the movie is quite to the same level—Ciaran Hinds, for example, is terrific as the devil. Though the pacing is frequently uneven and sometimes grinds to a halt, the action is solid once the movie gets into gear.

If you can get past Cage's acting and just view this as a goofy comic-book movie—complete with impressive 3D effects—*Vengeance* is certainly watchable and even enjoyable. It's just not nearly as good as it could be. The disc includes video commentary from the bizarre director duo, deleted scenes, and a multi-part making-of documentary. JD



Info

Price $45.99
Creators Neveldine/Taylor
Starring Nicolas Cage, Ciaran Hinds
Rated PG-13
Extras Commentary, deleted scenes, making-of.

PlayStation The Official Magazine 6

Blu-ray Roundup

21 Jump Street

Price: $35.99 **Rated:** R

Juvenile, crude, and dumb, this comedic revamp of the '80s TV show is also amazingly hilarious. While the two leads (especially Jonah Hill) aren't stretching past their usual shtick, the jokes are machine-gun fast and effective, and the movie isn't afraid to make fun of everyone. ⑧

Cat Run

Price $26.98 **Rated** R

Fun, violent, and well paced, *Cat Run* mixes comedy with action to mostly positive effect. Although not all the jokes hit the mark, this light take on the British crime genre is definitely entertaining. Janet McTeer's Mary Poppins-style assassin is the evilest we've ever seen. ⑦

Grimm

Price $69.98 **Rated** NR

Starting off a little slow, the latest "monster of the week" show gets better as it goes. With its roots in the classic fairy tales, Grimm manages to create some fun twists on standard monsters and has one of the best wolf-man sidekicks ever. ⑦

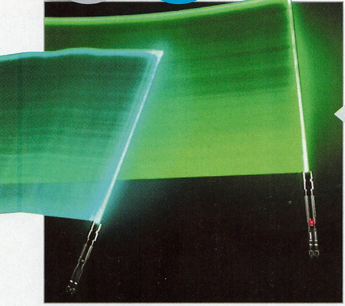
Superman vs. The Elite

Price $24.98 **Rated** PG-13

WB Animation's latest offers a deep look at the effects of violence and Superman's influence in an era where his Boy Scout values seem obsolete. The movie blends a classic '60s look and feel with modern themes to great effect, and proves to be one of the best in the series. ⑧

Want that

Lust-have stuff for PlayStation people



LaserSaber

A must-have for any *Star Wars* cosplayer, the LaserSaber is a 32-inch polycarbonate wand fused to an aluminum hilt that screws directly onto any of the company's Spyder 3 lasers (required, and another $250+).

$99

wickedlasers.com

ThinkSound ms01 Monitors

Made with gorgeous recyclable wood, these ear buds deliver fantastic sound quality and come with four silicone ear inserts, ear-hooks, a cable clip, and a small mesh bag to carry everything.

$100

thinksound.com

thinksound

Ecobee Smart Si Thermostat

This hi-tech thermostat utilizes wireless connectivity, smartphone apps, and a learning algorithm to track central air performance and monitor current weather conditions to maximize energy savings.

$200

ecobee.com

72°
30°
ecobee

Verbatim SATA II 2.5-inch SSD Upgrade Kit

Available in 64GB to 256GB capacities, these solid-state drive kits improve responsiveness, extend battery life, and vastly minimize the chances of your hard drive getting borked.

$100+

verbatim.com

Verbatim
128GB
Solid State Drive

PowerBag Messenger by fül

The removable, lightweight, rechargeable 3000mAh battery that resides within the PowerBag can juice the average smartphone twice via Apple, Micro-USB, and Mini-USB connectors.

$140

mypowerbag.com

Timbuk2 Conveyor Wheeled Duffel

Features adjustable compression straps to expand or compress loads along with ballistic nylon construction, a bike-inspired handle, and detachable skateboard wheels.

$200

timbuk2.com

BEST BUY | rewardzone

GAMERS CLUB

[UNLOCKED]

VICTORY CAN BE PRE-ORDERED.

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GET $20 in Reward Certificates to spend on your next purchase at Best Buy® when you Pre-order and Purchase your next game from our select list.

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To be eligible, you must be a Reward Zone program Gamers Club Unlocked member and meet minimum age requirements of purchased game at time of pickup or shipment. Visit MyRewardZone.com/gamersclub for list of eligible game titles, street dates, minimum age and other requirements. Street dates are subject to change by publisher. Offer valid at BestBuy.com and in Best Buy stores in 50 U.S./D.C. (excluding Puerto Rico). Game must be pre-ordered by street date and purchased as follows: (1) If you pre-order in-store or online for In-Store Pickup, purchase and pick up game within 7 days of street date; or (2) If you pre-order online for Ship to Home, your purchase will be processed and shipped on or about street date. Please provide Reward Zone member number at time of pre-order and pickup. Eligible Gamers Club Unlocked members will receive 1,000 Reward Zone points (worth $20 Reward Certificate) per qualified purchase. Limit one award per member per title. Points will post to your account approximately 30 days from time of pickup or shipment. Follow instructions on MyRewardZone.com to issue your Reward Certificate. Reward Zone membership and Reward Certificates are subject to Reward Zone program rules. Gamers Club Unlocked subscriptions ($14.99 per year) are available for purchase in Best Buy stores only. If you are not a Gamers Club Unlocked member at time of pre-order, you must join in-store prior to game pickup or shipment. If you join on day of in-store pickup, enrollment must be on the same transaction as game pickup and member number must be provided to be eligible. If you join after game pickup or shipment, you will not be eligible to receive an award for that title. No dealers. No rainchecks.

mail@ptom

PS3 | PSP | PSVITA
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
KRATOS! GOD OF WAR IS BACK
20 Insane Trophies We dare you to attempt
World exclusive screens and info
METAL GEAR RISING
Raiden returns with a Revengeance!
REVIEWED
Max Payne 3
Starhawk
Dragon's Dogma
Ghost Recon: Future Soldier
Future
DmC PLAYSTATION ALL-STARS RESIDENT EVIL 6 CRYSIS 3

Pretty *sharp* cover, right guys? Get it?? *Sharp*? We're such cutups.

Street Fighter heads to the desert and we talk Trophies with a man named Sword. Epic!

Email us at PTOM_letters@futureus.com or write to PTOM, c/o Future US, 4000 Shoreline Ct. Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Fighting Spirit

I'm currently deployed to Afghanistan as a civilian contractor, and I love to play fighting games. When I first got out here, I found that most of my coworkers were bigger fans of FPS games like *Modern Warfare*, so I took my gaming to my local USO center. There I met another *Street Fighter* fan, and from there, more and more turned up. Soon we had a whole group we called the "Kandahar Assassins" [we even had t-shirts made], and we met every night. We played so religiously that it was hard to find a challenge after a while, especially since we used our own personal copies of the games. Soldiers would come in asking the staff about the games we played so they could check them out and jump on a PS3, but the USO didn't have them. The only copy of *Super Street Fighter 4* they did have was broken, and there was no telling when they'd get a new one.

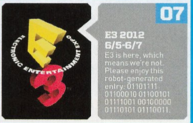
Then my pal got a great idea: Why not donate games to the USO? We bought a copy of *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3* and *Street Fighter X Tekken* for the USO, and lo and behold, more and more soldiers started playing. Soon we had decent competition, and we got a chance to get to know more and more people. The friendly folks over at Hitbox LLC actually offered to donate one of their awesome arcade controllers to our USO center here in Kandahar! It's amazing how the fighting game community can get together, even in a warzone, and have a good time.

JARVIS THE INTERNET

Good on you guys! Thanks for your service and for this remarkable example of how fighting can, ironically enough, bring us all together.

01001100 01001111 01001100

The E3 announcement [in the Calendar section], issue 59, "Obey us." I see what you guys did there. This is exactly the kind of fun thing I miss about the old PSM, from the jokes hidden in the publisher info (Bill [Donohue] had some good ones in there back in the day) to the quips stuck on the inner spine of the pages. I miss this sort of goofy thing, but I really appreciate when you guys pull it off in new issues. Keep it up. **BRAD** THE INTERNET



07

E3 2012
6/5-6/7
E3 is here, which means we're not. Please enjoy this robot-generated entry: 01101111. 01100010 01100101 01111001 00100000 01110101 01110011.

We always try to keep things light here at PTOM. We even have mandatory laughter breaks every day. Humor is strictly enforced.

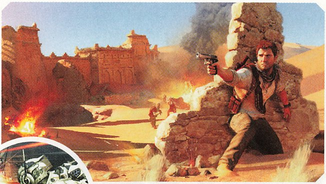
Mother Knows Best

I am a gaming mother of two tweens. I watched my son play *Uncharted*, and I was hooked. After all the yelling at each other, he told me I could play the games once he finished. LOVED all three games: the storylines, the characters, and the intensity. When can we expect an *Uncharted 4*? Waiting in anticipation for my next gaming experience.

LINDA TORONTO, CANADA

We welcome reader photos, letters, and stories ("Submissions"), however, we cannot promise to publish any Submission and none will be returned. Neither PlayStation: The Official Magazine ("PTOM") nor Future US, Inc. shall be liable for loss or damage to any Submission. By sending in your Submissions to PTOM you represent and warrant that you own or otherwise have all necessary rights to the Submissions to allow us to publish them in PTOM and as follows. You grant PTOM a worldwide, royalty-free, perpetual, irrevocable, non-exclusive right and fully sub-licensable license to use, copy, distribute, publish, modify, adapt, translate, and store, your Submissions, in any form, format, or medium, of any kind now known or later developed and to use your name, likeness, and any other information in connection with the use of the Submission you provide.

Given that Uncharted *creator Naughty Dog is currently working on the far grittier* The Last of Us, *it might be a while before we see another numbered Nathan Drake game. However,* Uncharted: Golden Abyss *on PS Vita holds up nicely, and the PS3 offers plenty of adventure in other flavors. Check out the* Assassin's Creed II *for another epic story with a whole lot of climbing or the original* BioShock *for a masterfully written cinematic experience that's a little on the darker side.*



Bragging Rights (and Wrongs)

Regarding your feature on "20 Insane Trophies" [issue 60]: I suppose I can forgive the omission of *Aliens vs. Predator's* "I LOVE The Corps – Complete Marine Campaign on Nightmare Difficulty Setting," but to leave *Vanquish's* "Tactical Challenger – Complete all of the Tactical Challenges in *Vanquish*" off the list is as unforgiving as the Trophy itself. This is one of the most notoriously difficult Trophies to obtain on the entire PS3 platform and certainly more difficult than some of the others you've listed. Don't believe me? Go ahead and try and pop that sucker yourselves!

GREG SWORD ATLANTA, GA

You know, Greg, we got a lot of letters informing us that we'd neglected this or that impossible Trophy, but only one came from a person named Greg 'effing Sword. Seriously, how much do you love your name?

Suggestion Box

I'm typing in disappointment to whoever is in charge of PSN Directory. Never have I ever seen such waste of a few pages. And I am sure I'm not the only one disappointed. So I made some brainstorming hoping you'll take kindly my suggestions: Hanging out in PS Home with one of your random subscribers, take a look back a decade ago on what was hot in gaming, pictures of what goes on behind the scenes at PTOM office, take a zoomed in game character photo and have us guess who it is, or even ads. Then you can leave PSN Directory for the end of the year.

VERTEX THE INTERNET

We appreciate the constructive criticism! Honestly, we have no plans to alter the Directory (it offers a valuable service to new readers), but thanks for at least offering some solutions instead of just complaining. Gold star. Your ideas will be considered.

A Knight's Tale

I have a bone to pick with PSN, Level-5, and D3Publisher regarding the way they're treating their customers. I'm a big fan of *White Knight Chronicles II*, and right now in North America and Europe, all the players have been ignored and forgotten. We want the remaining DLC on the game disc. D3 has come out on their Facebook page and said that the remaining DLC is and always was intended to be Japan exclusive, but that's crap. We paid for the disc; now we want what's on it. Some have modified their save data to gain access to this stuff. Is that the message we're sending these days? Break the Sony user agreement and you get to enjoy the complete game? Why would they end the game with a scene from the remaining DLC and a message saying "To be continued..." and then say it's Japan exclusive? Why put it on the disc if they had no intention of releasing it? And Sony is just as much at fault for allowing it to happen to online gamers who have put up with enough problems with the network. When I call with a question about this, they just ignore it. I'm boycotting Level-5, D3, and maybe even Sony if this DLC garbage continues.

B. JONES THE INTERNET

That definitely sounds unfair, B-Jones, but bear in mind that localization costs money. We're guessing the DLC is entirely in Japanese—even on North American discs—and that D3 isn't inclined to invest more money in a game that, frankly, didn't do so well in the American market. It would certainly be a nice gesture if D3 went ahead and unlocked it anyway, but until then, it may be time to move on to another RPG.

Ask Scott

Q Is Solid Snake based on Snake Plissken from the movie *Escape from LA* starring Kurt Russell? Both have that scruffy voice, both are sent in to infiltrate, and both sport eye patches over the left eye. Isn't this all too much a coincidence?

MISTY MEDVIN LAKEPORT, CA

A It certainly is too much of a coincidence. Solid Snake's open-faced similarities to Snake Plisskin are well documented and can be traced all the way back to original game. Of course, all doubt was totally removed when Solid Snake gave "Snake Plissken" as a fake name when he first encountered new protagonist Raiden in *Metal Gear Solid 2*. Turns out Hideo Kojima really likes campy action movies (big surprise).

Et Cetera

All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

London 2012 Olympics

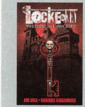
"I admit it: Every time the Olympics roll around, I become a jingoistic nationalist. This time I'll don the red, white, and blue face paint for Women's Soccer and the Modern Pentathlon (which is essentially videogame-centric skills made into an Olympic event)."

ROGER BURCHILL

Giant's Despair

"Gypsy sounds a whole lot like seminal downer punk rock band Jawbreaker, but their debut *Giant's Despair* succeeds in its own right, swerving elegantly between thoughtful and driving, intimate and punishing. Pick it up from b9store.com!"

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH



Locke & Key

"There's nothing I don't love about *Locke & Key* by Joe Hill. The story is dark and fascinating, and the characterization is perfect. It's easily my favorite comic right now."

ANNE LEWIS

BLR
BAD LIP READING

Bad Lip Reading

"BLR doesn't make parody videos so much as it makes bizarre, hilarious, and infectiously catchy original songs based on absurdly wrong lip-readings of singers and politicians. Watch them all at BadLipReading.com."

MIKEL REPARAZ

PSN
Best Games

It's the best of the best! Get the lowdown on this month's PSN goodies no one should live without.

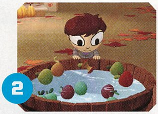
BEST FULL GAMES

A Beautiful Death

Limbo

Limbo may have taken its time coming to PSN, but it was worth the wait. This platformer melds simple controls with supremely challenging gameplay and a beautiful, but chilling, aesthetic. It's the rare game where we die often but never feel frustrated.

10 Pub **Playdead**
Dev **Playdead**



Tricks and Treats

Costume Quest

Sure, *Quest* is Halloween-themed, but the adventure itself is timeless. With candy and monster-smiting in equal measure, this sugary RPG is a charming homage to classics like *Final Fantasy*, enhanced by developer Tim Schafer's trademark sense of humor.

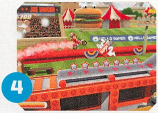
9 Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**

Frightening Lightning

inFamous
Festival of Blood

This standalone spinoff sees *inFamous* hero Cole MacGrath facing off against vampires. At stake? (groan) Cole's very own soul. It's enough to make vampires fashionably cool again—in spite of *Twilight*.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Sucker Punch**

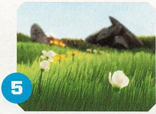


Thrills and Spills

Joe Danger

An enthralling mix of *Excitebike*-style racing and insane stunt-driven platforming action, this vibrant indie gem shines brightly among the best PSN offerings available. Getting wild and dangerous on a motorbike has never been this awesome.

9 Pub **Hello Games**
Dev **Hello Games**



Zen Exploration

Flower

This gorgeous concept game turns blowing hordes of fluttering petals around a lush natural environment into an unforgettable experience that holds up against the biggest AAA offerings. Consider it a suitable substitute for a bouquet for your loved one.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**

Pixel Perfection

PixelJunk Shooter

Featuring alien- and rock-blasting galore, the fourth entry in the *PixelJunk* series is easily the best. Saving trapped mining colonists with a versatile, environmental-puzzle-solving ship is a creative and challenging affair that taxes both our minds and our reflexes.

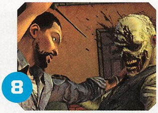
9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Q-Games**

Medieval Madness

Might & Magic
Clash of Heroes

Don't overlook *Heroes*. With throwback 2D visuals and a turn-based battle system, the RPG-flavored puzzle action requires stacking creatures for attacks and building walls for defense. It may look and play old school, but it's still mighty fun and magically challenging.

9 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Capybara Games**



Has Heart, Wants Brains

The Walking Dead
Episode 1-A New Day

Licensed games are usually horrific, and not in the good way. *The Walking Dead* bucks the trend with a riveting episodic adventure marked by an engrossing narrative, life-changing decisions, and heart-pounding showdowns with zombie hordes.

9 Pub **Telltale Games**
Dev **Telltale Games**

Ladies' (Fight) Night

Skullgirls

With the fighting genre in the midst of a resurgence, it's nice to see a new IP join the fray. *Skullgirls* features a cast of eight hand-drawn, superpowered femme fatales in glorious 2D and offers an enticing mix of accessibility and depth. Don't overlook this one.

9 Pub **Konami / Autumn Games**
Dev **Reverge Labs**

We Are Not Alone

Journey

The hauntingly beautiful and atmospheric *Journey* has us wandering a desert to reach a distant mountain. Along the way, we may or may not encounter and wordlessly communicate with fellow travelers who can aid us in our quest. Is this a game or a metaphor for life?

8 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're downloading to our PS3 this month

"Don't forget to dot the i's!"

The Three Stooges

The Three Stooges

ETA **July 17** Rated **PG** Genre **Comedy** Studio **Wessler Entertainment**

The Three Stooges opens with our three heroes attempting to save the orphanage they grew up in and ends...with starring roles in a reality TV show? Actors Will Sasso, Sean Hayes, and Chris Diamantopoulos recreate the classic blundering trio to startlingly similar effect, with the lovely Sofía Vergara stepping in as a temptress with murderous intentions. Cameos from other celebs—like the cast of *The Jersey Shore*—attempt to keep the film in the now while maintaining the original shorts' familiar abusive slapstick comedy.

Top VDS Downloads

Movies

Chronicle
Underworld: Awakening
The Grey
Contraband
This Means War

TV Shows

WWE: WrestleMania 28
The Legend of Korra
The Walking Dead: Season 2
Supernatural: Season 7
Family Guy: Season 10

BEST FREE STUFF

1

Kick-Mass Expansion

Mass Effect 3 Rebellion Multiplayer Expansion

The devastating Reegar Carbine, awesome new human classes, and additional maps make this multiplayer expansion essential.

Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **BioWare**

2

Stick Play

Hustle Kings Crazy Table Pack: Basement Crazy DLC

Playing pool on a truly bizarre table design spices up the already tasty cue-flicking action.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **VooFoo Studios**

3

Mini Motoring

MotorStorm RC Add-On Update

Aside from gameplay balance tweaks, this update changes up the tracks available in the trial version, giving newcomers a chance to try out new rides and courses.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Evolution Studios**

4

SSXy Style

SSX Defy Reality Theme

Who doesn't love flying upside-down through the air above snowy mountains while (occasionally) strapped to a board? Commemorate reality-bending snowboarding awesomeness with this theme.

Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **EA Canada**

Broadcast Information

5

Handy Videos

Nico Nico Vita App

This social-networking app lets us access our favorite videos online while sharing comments. With its focus on anime, fashion, music, and space, Nico Nico is a great fit for Japanophiles.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Nico Nico**

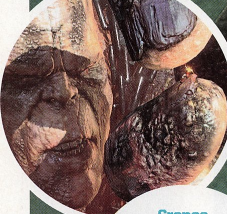
Giants

Standing on the shoulders of PlayStation's behemoths

All of 'em

Shadow of the Colossus

Imagine throwing an old lady from her seat on the bus, then giving her a wedgie. Multiply that shame by 14 and you're not even close to the guilt that we feel offing the majestic Colossi. As hero Wander, it's our mission to hunt them so we can harness their essence to resurrect our missus. That's true love for you...



Cronos

God of War III

Forget having to constantly wash minotaur blood out of his loincloths, we pity Kratos for suffering a family so dysfunctional they make the Manson gang look as wholesome as the Brady Bunch. Although his dad Zeus once eviscerated him, his grandfather Cronos is just as bad. In *GOWIII*, the titan tries to eat Kratos like a balding killer puff pastry.

Stone Idol Titan

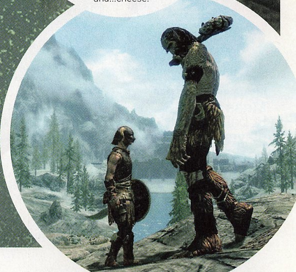
Castlevania: Lords of Shadow

Unless we're talking about the eyebrow-raising wrassler, the average rock is unlikely to cause terror. Of course, this golem ain't your common pebble. A boss fight that liberally borrows from *Shadow of the Colossus*, hero Gabriel must use all his platforming prowess to conquer the stony brute.

Grok

Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

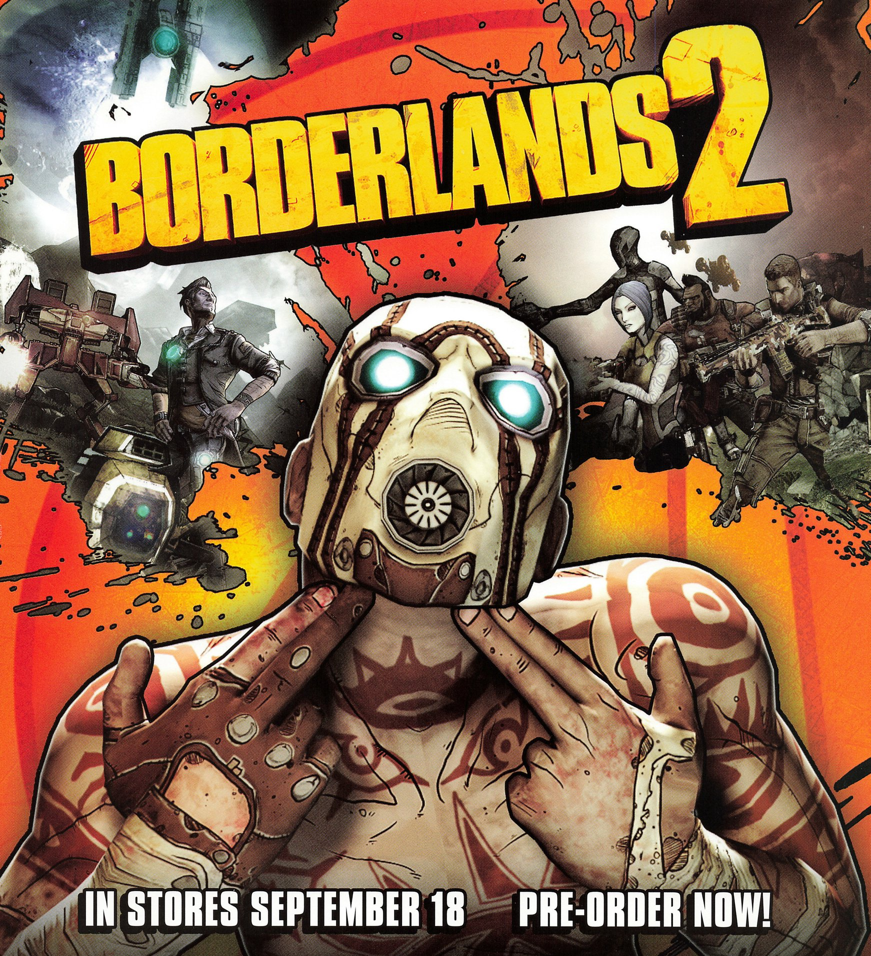
During a big night out in *Skyrim*, we drunkenly steal a goat and sell it to this oversized dude (we've all been there), later having to retrieve it in order to complete a quest. Might sound a bit intimidating, but Grok and his kind are more gentle than they appear. In fact, they're skilled farmers who herd mammoth for meat, furs, and...cheese.



André the Giant

WWE: Legends of Wrestlemania

Standing at over seven feet tall, André was the most intimidating Frenchman this side of Napoleon. While he'd often slap Hulk Hogan around for fun, the Eighth Wonder of the World was actually fairly gentle. Anyone who doesn't tear up over his role in *The Princess Bride* is an utter monster.



MATURE 17+
M
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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Language
Sexual Themes
Use of Alcohol

PS3
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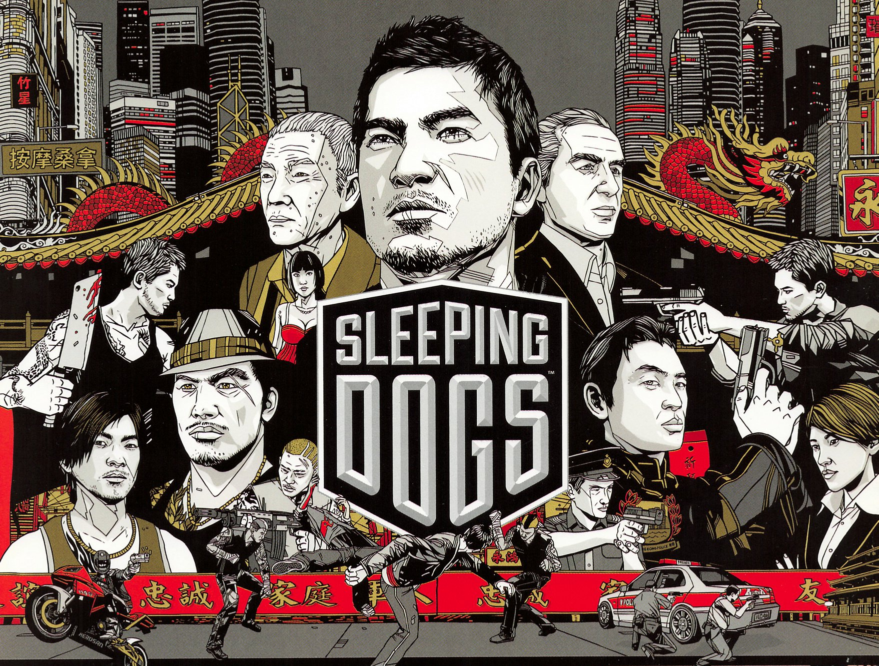

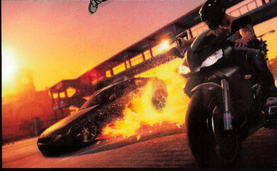

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